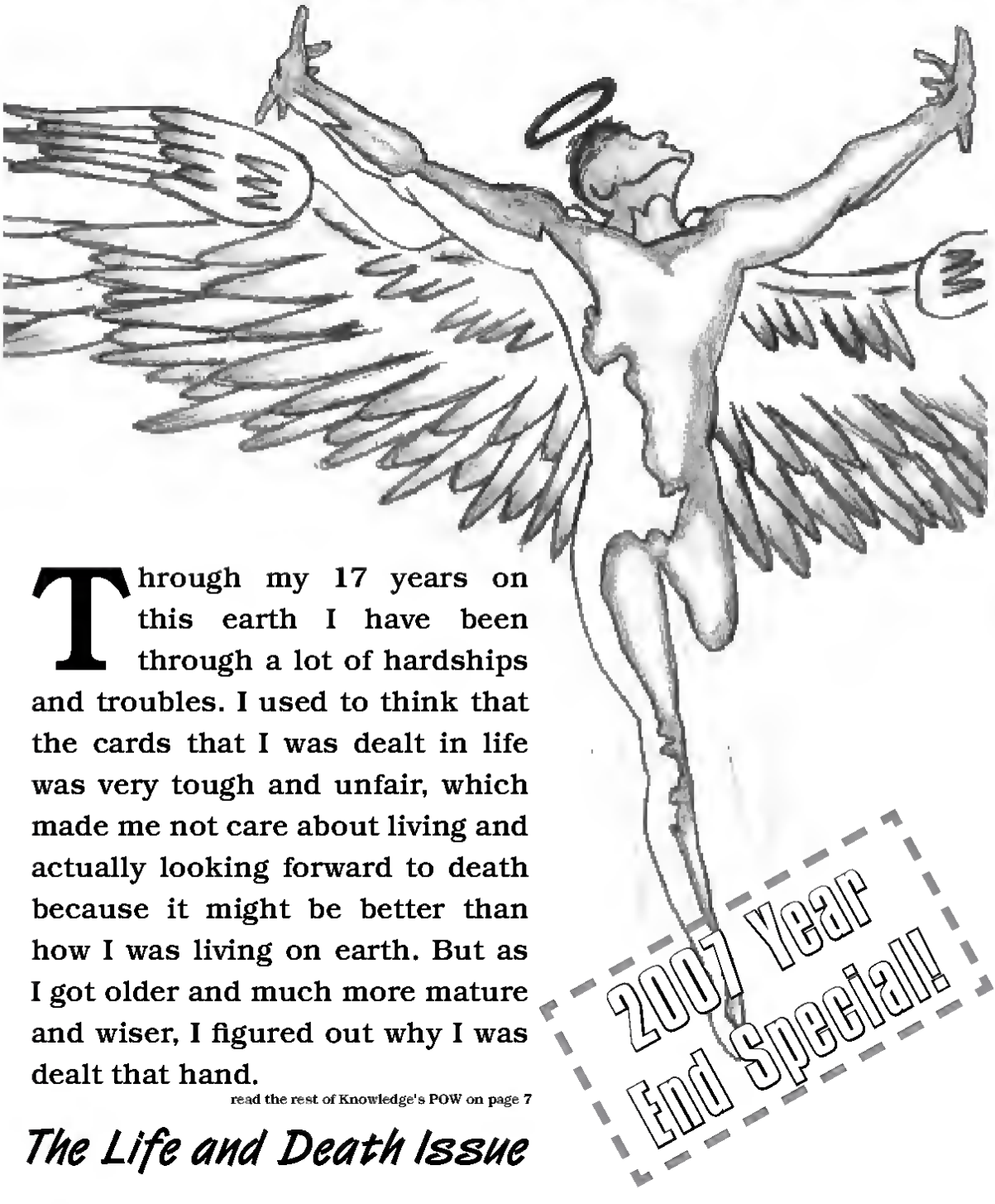
THE BEAT WITHIN ▪ A WEEK[illegible] PUBLICATION [illegible] ISSUE 12.46

The Beat Within



Through my 17 years on this earth I have been through a lot of hardships and troubles. I used to think that the cards that I was dealt in life was very tough and unfair, which made me not care about living and actually looking forward to death because it might be better than how I was living on earth. But as I got older and much more mature and wiser, I figured out why I was dealt that hand.

read the rest of Knowledge's POW on page 7

The Life and Death Issue

2007 Year End Special!

Life DEATH

— EDITOR'S NOTE • VOLUME 12.46 —

Welcome editorial note readers to the last issue of 2007! We can't believe we made it to this point, 45 issues later, and despite the setbacks – health, finances, personnel issues that we have been dealing with all year – we have had a successful year and leave you with a pretty damn good issue. You best believe we look forward to our thirteenth season which is right around the corner!

This week's special issue is devoted to the writings on "Life and Death." We truly believe The Beat writers give us Beat readers an eye-opening glimpse into their worlds, on two very challenging topics.

Here's the breakdown on the topics as they were presented to our readers during the workshops...

This issue will be the special "Life and Death Issue." In this issue only pieces that touch on life and death will be published. The following questions pertaining to Life and Death will hopefully give you some insight on what to share with The Beat readers. Any pieces not on topic will be featured in the following issue.

"Death..." - What comes to mind for you when you hear the word death? Death is dark, heavy and painful, yet many of us thrive on living on the edge, selling dope, packing guns, and living with that gangsta "I don't give a shhh" mentality. Sure all of us one day are going to die, but tragically many of us have lost loved ones to violence at young ages. Can you pay your respects in The Beat of that special someone who left us too soon? What have you learned from going to funerals? Do you go? Tell us about your grieving process. What can you tell readers about being on the scene of a fatal crime? Have you seen death? What is that like to witness first hand the tragic death of a close family member or a total stranger? What must a mother/father (any family member) go through, losing their child? How have you dealt with death up to this point? From reading The Beat for many years now, sadly, it appears that many of you seem to know death too well, so we look to you for answers as you share your thoughts, pains and insights on death.

"Life..." - If you chose this topic, then you chose life. The following is a series of questions and we want you to pick ONE and write as much as you can about it. Whose life do you value and why? Can you put a value on life and if so what is life worth? If you've ever been close to a newborn child, describe that experience? If you were to have a fresh start, how would you use it? If you were able to choose the life you wanted, what life would you choose? Would you risk your life to save someone else's, who's life would it be and why would you save it? Describe your favorite birthday. Who's the person you love most and why? Have you ever loved someone besides your family and if so how did that turn out? Remember that this topic is about life, so whatever you want to write about this topic is fine, as long as pertains to life...

"A Tattoo Representing Either Life Or Death..." - We know many of you get tats because the image means a whole lot to you. So if you were to get a tat representing either life or death, what would that image be and why would you get it?

Knowing this, we must admit we almost did not get this issue completed, it was definitely a collective effort, and we asked at the last minute our colleague Michael Kroll to share his thoughts and write the editorial note. Thank you Michael. Here's Michael on life and death...!

These are concepts that human beings have been trying to understand, define — and deal with — since there have been human beings. The meaning of life and death has concerned poets and priests, philosophers and fortune-tellers, opinion makers and ordinary people alike. In short, all of us are consumed with living our lives until death takes us.

And death takes all of us. The last words of the first person in the modern age put to death in California's gas chamber (1992) were: "You can be a king or street sweeper, but everybody dances with the Grim Reaper." Probably not original, but true.

But when we think of death, it's usually in relation to others, not ourselves. When we're children, we worry about losing our parents. And when we're older, we pray that we will die before our children. In every issue of this sterling magazine, we read how many of you would give your lives for your families and loved ones. And so — especially in the wake of our own recent loss of someone we knew and cared for — we've been thinking a lot about what death leaves behind.

A dear friend recently told us that he wished he could believe in God and the afterlife to help him accept and deal with the loss of the person that was closest to him, to comfort him with words like, "He's in a better place now." But the truth is, we can't know what death is like.

Do the righteous live forever in Paradise? Do "bad" people go to hell to spend eternity with the devil? Do our souls migrate into the bodies of newborn babies (or animals), or do none of these things happen, and we simply no longer exist as living matter, we simply turn to dust; nothing more.

Like we said, we can't know what death is like. But we can know what it does to those left behind, those required to bury the dead. Every death we experience changes us, and it changes us forever. It doesn't matter if it was your grandmother who died at home of heart disease or your young homie who was caught slipping and paid the price. It doesn't matter if you are the "dopest" gangster on your block or the squarest straight-A student, when you lose someone you love, you are injured and in pain — and you are changed forever.

How do we deal with this pain? Some people keep themselves occupied (one way or another) so that they don't have to think about it. Some dedicate their lives to positive deeds that honor the memory of the person they are mourning. Some strike out in anger — often at those standing nearest to them — to inflict the pain rather than feel it. Others strike out in a kind of ritualistic anger, a street code of retaliation, of death for death and pain for pain.

And some — especially after being exposed to death repeatedly — either seal themselves off from feelings or live in a permanent state of rage. An Army study found that at least one in every eight soldiers returning from combat in Iraq suffered from Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), but less than half looked for help because they didn't want to seem weak. And so, they began to seal themselves off.

We say that because we read a lot of pieces in The Beat by writers who describe their hearts as stone, their inability to cry at funerals, their having no feelings for anyone. These are all signs of PTSD. If at least one in eight adult combat veterans returning from Iraq are suffering from this dangerous condition, how many of you, our dear writers, are acting or reacting in ways you find confusing and hard to control because you are suffering from the effects of PTSD?

Those that seal themselves off from feelings often become self-destructive. They don't care about their own lives, or anyone beyond themselves. They don't need to justify the short and long-term pain they are inflicting on those who deserve it the least, because they are not thinking about anything or anyone. They are milking out or sitting alone in a dark room. They are getting drunk or otherwise numbing their minds. They are hurting themselves. They don't care. They are hurting others. They don't care. They are hurting!

And, in truth, as much as we'd like to sometimes, we can't take anyone's pain away. Each of us must deal with our own pain in our own way, but pain is the constant consequence of death — not to the deceased, but to the living. And every issue of this great magazine reminds us that you have seen and dealt with far too much death, and therefore far too much pain.

All we can offer you is an opportunity to deal with it on these pages.

This issue of The Beat is not dedicated to the dead as much as to those left behind by death — to those still dealing with life. We don't want to exploit your pain, but we do want to offer these pages to express it in the knowledge that art (and writing is an art) can break through the self-destructive impulse, can release the rage. In art, we can begin to fill the emptiness of our loss through shared memory. In the written word, we can bring the dead to life, and perhaps in so doing, begin to heal ourselves.

And it is no exaggeration to say that this last issue of The Beat Within for the year 2007 is full of literary art. As we've grown accustomed to, enough of you Beat writers who took these deep subjects of life and death seriously enough to produce another gem of a publication that we're proud to put our names on.

To the living, to those who struggle every day, to those who fall and get up again, to those who seek the light in the darkness, we dedicate this issue of The Beat Within.

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The Beat Within a weekly newsletter of writing and art by incarcerated youth, is published by Pacific News Service.

At The Beat Within, we go through a lot of work to cultivate appropriate content: no racial remarks, foul language, and gang references. There is enough negativity in our environment already—we don't want it here. It is The Beat Within's goal to give the power back to the youth writers and artists.

The Beat Within publishes the opinions / views expressed by the participants in our workshops. This is simply the point of view of the youth. The views expressed do not necessarily reflect the views of the publishers, editors or staff. All rights are reserved. Nothing that is published can be reproduced without written permission.

To our writers: What you write is valuable to us. Your work has been read, considered, and discussed by our entire staff. Each piece is given a thorough critique. Please do not send us multiple submissions at once. We can only accept a limited number of pieces per week, so please be patient.

Co-Founders: Stacy Close and Judy Goldman

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Norcal JJDP - County, New Mexico "The Law of Radiance staff" Juvenile Probation Department Beat Staff: Steve Stone

Art: Many of the artwork you see in the Journal is the work...

Spiritual Advisor: Jack and Jan

Special Volunteer: Nancy McMorris

Book Donor: Marisela Norte

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Gratitude: Thanks to all the participating writers and artists in the San Francisco Martin de Porres Academy, Santa Clara, New Mexico, Alameda County, New Mexico, Santa Barbara, Marin County Juvenile Halls. If you have any questions or comments about The Beat Within, or if you would like to become involved, please contact us at: 275 Ninth St. SF, CA. 94103 or call (415) 553-4171 or e-mail us at:

www.thebeatwithin.org

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An Email

Merry Christmas! Happy Holidays! I wish you and all the Beat staff safety and moments of peace and rest through this busy time of the year. And then on to a new year with more opportunities to reach out and make a difference...

The following is a tribute I wrote to The Beat Within... all The Beat stands for and all you and all the staff accomplish in the lives of young people!! I was inspired to begin this journey with poetry by two Spoken Word poets-Corbet Dean and Talaam Acey. I began to write and I am not surprised that a thank-you to The Beat Within is what immerged first, as The Beat takes up a good portion of my heart. Ha!

From The Beat: We are extremely honored to have this next writer share such a brilliant poem filled with life!! Yeah, this is a tribute to The Beat Within publication and all the love that goes into doing this work. We do hope you all enjoy the following and see this priceless work of art in the spirit of how much joy and satisfaction this program gives us all. Thank you Tkasu, a youth advocate who writes us from Maricopa County in Arizona. And a big thanks to all you counselors and advocates who step up daily in helping to raise awareness and improve the lives of our young people in the juvenile justice system. See you in 2008!

Hope Found

Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks...
Pouring out self on paper,
what is it anyone seeks
in creating verses worth repeating?
Could it be the sublime?
Accepting the inevitable,
that articulate verses and rhymes
will flow sometimes when I least expect it,
in the hard times,
when the emotions I carry within
are no longer contained.
I surprise myself, and am surprised at the same
in others, how in the midst of personal pain
one can be so inspired.
Life has often pummeled a creative soul aspiring
to reach within for a glimpse of heaven
that others may behold
I guess it stands without reason that talent will unfold
and come to light in dark places,
where you find hearts aching
Yes, there are people held in prisons
of their own making
Sometimes these prisons are hard to detect.
Others perpetrating
incredulous acts of violence or greed
find themselves now estimating the days
they will have to spend behind intimidating walls.
Their desperation found in pent up scrawls
Searing words stabbing paper.
Endless verses intimating deep emotions,
once hidden behind foul curses.
For beaten hearts is there hope?
The answer is found when one reads
the words written by teens doing time.
Hope harvested after planting seeds
of literacy that could lift young minds out of the haze
and challenge them to grow
beyond limitations. In juvenile detention,
I've seen young people come and go
talented and intelligent,
yet scoffing at education in school,
eyeing authority with bravado and distrust,
Entrepreneurs, in a sense, looking for a quick buck.
But it's when they hear the loud clang of metal, are
enveloped in silence and endlessly stuck
in their own thoughts, needing a listening ear, an
outlet for the emotions they hold back,
that once ignored, reading and writing take on new
meaning, relieve the boredom, and the impact
on this captive audience is that they might just get
hooked on the power of words
and the relief of finding an audience for what flows
through their soul So will they be heard?In 2003
editors and writers from San Francisco, visited the

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Valley of the Sun
and shared their vision and goal of a publication
releasing voices in juvie hall through paper and pencil.
The Beat Within birthed in the hearts
of Sandy Close and David Inocencio.
Perceiving these teenagers
could no longer remain ignored
Beat staff began a journey of exploration,
because they'd been floored
in 1996 from the intensity of emotion
sparked by Tupac's demise.
Now what The Beat Within attempts to create each week
flies in the face of conventional wisdom.
But after witnessing the grief and widespread loss
of a generation,
found in piece after piece,
reflecting the heart of detained youth
is what staff in the Bay
strive for, releasing imprisoned minds and hearts by
providing a way
for young people to find themselves and to know that they
are not alone.
This medium of self-expression is sewn
together with pulsating heart and sheds light on dark
subjects.
That what Beat writers have to say is sometimes
shocking, reflects
a view of society struggling beneath a weight
of confusing messages of worshipping wealth and
expressing hate
through computerized violence.
The rich and the famous pampering pets
while returning from war as heroes, Iraq war vets,
who deserve efficient,
top-notch medical and psychiatric care
are left instead to face the realities of Vet hospitals in
disrepair.
Look into the inner cities,
find american dreams mired in dope
sold to make a profit at others expense.
Wrestling addiction with sparse hope
and limited available resources to change,
desperate people turn to what they know.
Work hard to achieve the american dream?
The hardest work, though,
seldom yields the means.
Folks living paycheck to paycheck,
barely making ends meet
are one bad break away from being broke,
homeless and begging for something to eat.
Yet we still subscribe to have all we can,
no matter what the cost.
And we say the best things in life are free, while lost
in mounting credit card debt amidst materialistic wonder.
Facing personal lack and faceless existence,
family's asunder,
teens looking to belong and fit in, may find themselves
locked up in a cell...
sent to prison for attempting to seize heaven
while living in hell.
Is it any wonder these young people are confused and tell
us they are lacking in hope,
don't plan to live past twenty one?
Is it possible the ruthless nature they are thrust into can
be undone?
We believe we can contain hate
and strife behind barbed wires
but I ask, instead, is there a lesson to be learned in all the
forest fires
engulfing homes up the coast and mountainous desert
terrain,
that it only takes a spark,
a flame fueled by fury uncontained
to destroy what we hold dear. Recognizing this truth
and witnessing year in and year out proof
in the power of the written and spoken word to give
opportunity for expression of soul, even when to live
is unbearable and confusing,
a relief to know you're not alone
in your experience and the emotional truth you own.
I give props to The Beat Within for stepping up against
great odds
Year after year advocating for young men and women in
pods
of stone and steel, not fanning the flames
of hate and strife, but offering answers to games
of life played out for decades and challenging us to open
our eyes
and see that our youth behind bars have a voice and the
size
of audacity and talent that when nurtured with time and
direction
may result in a positive impact on a community, may stun
a neighborhood not with fear,
but awe and amazement
at what a mind can become when the pain is released and
one bent
on resolution and redemption, finding life not death.
Hopefully it will spread across the nation this vision of
releasing voices in the west.
Stand not in the way of this tide, lest
the overwhelmed dam of hate
and strife break and down us all
Finding our voices may we stand or silent we may fall.
Don't stop writing beaten hearts, write what you can, say
what you need to say
Write as if your very lives depended upon it.
Props Beat staff for each and every day
you offer hope and a voice to beating hearts...
hearts with lessons of life,
resilient, the words they impart
take flight above stone and sand
Hope undeniably found
in being eagerly read ..
clearly heard...
finally valued...
unexpectedly profound.

-Tkaeu, Youth Advocate, Maricopa County/Arizona

Don't stop writing beaten hearts, write what you can, say what you need to say
Write as if your very lives depended upon it.

Through the Nights

Through the nights I lay,
Sometimes I pray,
Why we do what we do,
And live to see another day.
But as I dream in the night,
I feel the fight,
The war that we live,
The things that I did it happens again.
But only it's a fake,
While I'm sleep in the night,
I feel my body shake,
Bullets hot they burn,
A trip to hell is earned,
Faces hurt in the past
Makes a nightmare last,
It feels way too real, getting hit wit' the steel,
But then I wake up, damn me, it's only a dream,
I go back to sleep now I hear my lady scream
Holdin' me in her arms 'cause I just got shot,
It feels so real but thank God it's not,
Why does it come to head, does God want me dead?
Or is it a message
to stop doing what I do before I run out of blessings, I really don't know.
I'm lost alone but when death's calling, I'ma pick up that phone.

-Angelo, Alameda

From The Beat: Or, you know, since you're too good for death or jail/ you could just wait on that ring and let it go to voicemail. Great flow, Angelo. As always!

Life Is Best

Life is death
Save year breath
Life is best
It may be your toughest test
To survive the street
Come through alive starting on two feet
It's the least you can do
Find a way to stay true
To your homies and your momma too
When you were young you played the foo'
Now that gangsta life ain't coo
So that uncle that knew
How to teach a youngsta like you
That It's a matter of life or death
Choose life and do your best
To save your breath
For the next generation
Born to a life of violence and hating
Life or death, teach
Life is best, reach
A higher level
Rise, above the street plus the devil
Didn't waste your life or lose it
Respect life and choose it
Find your higher mind and use it.

-Father Time, Santa Clara

From The Beat: It seems like you've learned some valuable lessons along life's highway. Have you found a way to "stay true to your homies and your momma too ? That sounds impossible in some situations, so who gets your loyalty when your boys want one thing from you and your mamma wants another? How do you show that you respect her and yourself?

even tho' mine didn't, i wanted your dreams to come true

The Life I Made

this p[illegible] is to tell you [illegible] life has just begun
I am [illegible] your father and I feel like I let you down
I was there when you was born, but now I'm not around
daddy made a lot of mistakes, now I'm in jail
I'm writin' you this poem because I messed up
but I refuse to fail
me and your mother were doing the right things
when you was born
things should have been how my heart is torn
I tried to hurt to take care of you,
just couldn't make ends meet
I was worried about getting high
and which girl I would see this week
[illegible] but everything I did in the streets I did for you
even though time hasn't, I wanted your dreams to come true
you really don't know
how much your birth changed my life
the feelin' I had was kind of like seeing jesus christ
I sit in my cell thinking, about you everyday
when I get out I'm gonna be there to stay
my biggest fear is you won't know me
calling someone else daddy
I couldn't take the thought of that
but I can't, put it past me
I'm your father no matter what I did
you are my baby boy, my only kid
you are my heart, my desire, the thing I protect above
you are my strength, my home and so much more
I was caught up wit the world to where I lost you
If I hadn't, then I would just have to kiss you
if you grow up and if I'm not there
just know that it wasn't because I didn't care
I don't like the mistakes I made,
because your life just began
I use to sit back and look at you and already know
you would be a better man
so many times I had to push through
those times may be all I am to give away,
but I have plans that are brand new
this poem is just a small portion of how I feel
like I was caught up in the streets now I feel like a real
life sometimes this poem it would take days, weeks, months
even years
I'm not writin' this poem with my fingers
I'm writin it wit my tears
look at what it means to you
I promise in all the ways I messed up
I will make it up to you
It feels like I've been away for so long
I'm doin' my best I just ask you to hold on
It's gonna end this poem with a see ya later and I love you
I love your father, reckie
I'm gonna get back to you and everything will be alright

- Reggie, Land Of Enchantment

From The Beat: It's amazing how we feel and what we truly miss when we end up behind bars. Your poem speaks volumes on how you feel for your son. Hold to your love for your son to make that change, so you'll never have to be away from him again.

The things I've been through I can't cry about or dwell on...

New Born Baby

One beautiful morning when I realized how our father above puts life on this earth was when my sister Elvia was born. It occurred on February 9, 2002 on a chilly Saturday morning.

As I walked into the hospital room after my sister was born I was overwhelmed, excited. The first time I laid my eyes on her, my dream for always wanting a sister came true. She was so fragile and helpless. As I held her in my arms for the first time I realized how life begins. She was a couple hours old and held on to my finger tight with her whole palm. I looked into her eyes and I felt a tear rolling down my cheek from happiness. Everything felt as if it was in slow motion and I never knew how much I could love someone after only knowing them for a couple minutes.

My love for her is unconditional and it grows day by day. When she was born that is when I realized how life begins.

-Rosite, Santa Clara

From The Beat: This is beautiful Rosite. We hope you are soon reunited with your sister.

How Would Life Be?

Life: a precious jewel
A spirit: so soft, so warm like wool
Life's challenges are hard
Like gambling with cards
Striving to succeed
How would life be...
If you lived in the suburbs?
If you weren't stubborn?
If you just listened?
If you were never missing?
If you had parents?
If instead of envy you would be caring?
If you still had that special person?
If you stop cursing?
If you never forgot what was love?
If a voice finally came from above?
If you were born a year later?
If you admired nature?
If you weren't in that place at that time?
If only you give up that life of crime?
If you never had that gun?
If you were released in a month?
If you had a lot of money?
If you had a wifey?
If you never had starved?
If in your soul, hate was never carved?
If there was room in your heart for one more love?
If you were never shoved?
If you seen the light?
If you were very bright?
If you hadn't used that knife?
If you had another form?
How would life be if you were never born?

-Lil' Roach, San Francisco

From The Beat: What a great series of questions! Now what would be interesting is to read your answers to these questions. You may not know all the answers, but we bet you know some of them. If any of these questions were true, then what?

Life, Not Death

Through my 17 years on this earth I have been through a lot of hardships and troubles. I used to think that the cards that I was dealt in life was very rough and unfair, which made me not care about living and actually [illegible] I prayed to death because it [illegible] better than how I was living on earth. But as I got older and much more mature and wiser, I figured out why I was dealt that hand.

The things I've been through I can't cry about or dwell on, just move on and try not to let my kids go through it. I feel I was dealt these cards because of its outcome and results that it gave me. I feel I have an old soul and wise mind because of the things I've been through. But I say all that to say this: before I knew why I was dealt this cards.

I used to be will and untamed. Live in the streets all night, into things that will get me put in jail for more years or having an early grave. My family was never in the picture of my life that much. So I felt I didn't have much to live for. My homies and trying to get money was the only thing I was living for.

But a few tragic things happened in my life which made me stop and look at what is going to happen in the next few years of my life. My girl had a miscarriage and my sister just had a baby. So by them given a new life, it made me want to live and see the future of my kid and nephew. I started looking back to school and finishing a lot of things that I had stopped doing when I didn't give a shhh. But now that I figured out what I am going to do in my life, I am doing and trying all the things that can get me as far as feet under or behind bars.

-Rodriguez, San Francisco

From The Beat: If you have learned to value and respect your own life (and the lives of others), then maybe your seventeen years of pain have paid off. Is that what you mean by "the results it gave me"? Keep your child and his (her) new cousin in your mind all the time, because — whether you have a wise old soul or a wise young one — we want to see a photo of you holding your grandchild in your arms.

Life

If I were to have a fresh start on life, I wouldn't have grown up, be fast and screwed with older people.

I would stay by your while I was and grew up the right way.

I wouldn't have never drank alcohol with my friends or smoked weed with my cousin. It is all about how you pick and choose what you do.

So if I could take everything back or rewind the hands of time because I am not really the bad person that my family and the world think I am. I just happened to be a young girl caught up with the wrong crowd.

All the kids that are in juvenile hall are not bad but don't get me wrong we all need to be in here.

The funny thing about life is that when you are having fun getting high and drunk, you don't think that you are doing anything wrong until you are in the back of the police car with handcuffs on. By then you know that you are deeper than you can swim.

About this time you're in the back of the police car your high is screwed up and you sober up. Your thoughts are racing. If you are going to jail this is your first? Will you cry when you get to the hospital? How are you going to get out. I think am the realization and you're there is "This shit is thing just F'd up my whole life and screwed."

Lots of other thoughts, but only one thought comes to my head, when I get to the hall I think "Can I want to restart my life."

-Rachel, Alameda

From The Beat: It just shows how great you are at writing that by the time we got to the end of this piece, we felt like WE were the ones cuffed in the back seat of a police car. It's a trip though, how when you're high, the only thing that matters is that... even though you're in cuffs and about to go through it in a real way. It's like if we wanted to INVENT a way to make people throw their lives away, we couldn't do better than what's already out there on the street! Awesome piece.

Life in A Cheetah's Eye

I am a cheetah in this world, don't you tell me I'm not,
I ran through the lost jungles of Cambodia , 100 degrees hot,
I know what I am, I know what I'm here for,
I'm here to get rich and take care of my family, and stay away from being poor.
Back in my country kids die from starvation,
In America young people get killed, from them haters,

Every time on our New Years we go to
Stockton to have fun,
But when the crips and bloods show up, they end
Up talking with their guns,

Cambodians are troubled, not because our race,
We start wars with each other, and that
Develops hate,

My life story is like numbers, it has no end,
I have so much to say, it just can't be written in
pen,

Guerrillas, invaded my jungles, Back in 1976,
Viet-congs, Khmer Rouges and others, not equal
One fought wit' sticks,

During the war, my country experienced a
National blood- bath,
I still wonder what made the communist leader
Pol Pot kill more than half,

Viet Congs often ran to Cambodia to avoid being
Caught,
Americans bombed the Ho Chi Minh trail, over 200
Battles were fought,

That war scarred my country, for well over
Three decades,
Many people are still lost, they can't figure out ways
To get paid,

The Capital Phnom Penh was forced to evacuate
Communist soldiers were comin'
When they got the word, they immediately left in
the jungles to go runnin',
When thoughts of the war comes to mind, they
are oh so deep,
Pol Pot ended up suffering, but it's sad that he
died in his sleep,

My family moved to the United States to start
A better life,
Male cousins go back to the country marrying family,
Members pretending it's their wife,

Don't get lost in my journey. This wasn't ... an
Ordinary dream,
Kids were shooting adults, it was a nightmare
Scene,

You'll probably think I'm a troubled kid if you
Look into my eyes,
If so read these poems I write, it will give you a different set of mind.

-Lil' Mang, Last Of A Dying Breed, Alameda

From The Beat: Wow, this poem is incredible, thank you for educating, sharing, teaching, and inspiring us with this lyric of Cambodian pride, drenched in blood, drenched in hope and history. But now, as you say, you are the future of all this struggle, you can decide: Will I carry on the hopes and dreams of my countrymen and ancestors? Or will I get diverted from my path by a series of American gang wars (think about it—crips and bloods are a 40 year old enmity from Los Angeles... Even their founders are against those gangs now. What is that, compared with the pride and struggle of your heritage? A bloody detour, a dead end side street. You have a bigger and better destiny, as this remarkable poem shows.

This Life

Life is beautiful
life is a blessing
I am a mother of a 21-month-old child.
The day that I gave birth to my daughter
Which was the greatest experience in my life.
I couldn't explain in words how it felt a feeling it is
to deliver a newborn child,
a child of God into this world.
It hurts because this world is so 'jacked' up these days,
so full of drugs and violence.
It hurts me the most because I'm addicted to drugs.
I can't care for a child when I can't even care for my
self.
I pray for a better life, for less drugs, less violence,
strength within my self to quit using and hope
that the future will be better and my daughter
won't have to go through what I have.

- Desiree, Land Of Enchantment

From The Beat: You have made the hardest step forward for most addicts, and that's accepting that you are an addict. Now take the next step in getting the help you need to fight your addiction. Think of your daughter, and ask yourself, what is more important, your high or your daughter.

Removing My Life Or Death Tattoo

Today's topics are life, death, and tattoos representing life or death. I have tattoos on my face and neck as if they are [illegible].

I think they represent death for me because it just [illegible] out there on the street as a rival gang member can easily take my life away. They can easily pull a gun out and blow my brains out. It can happen while I'm walking to the store, home, or to school. It can happen anytime, anywhere. This is why I chose to get my tattoos removed, before it's too late.

I wonder everyday where I would be at 5 years from now. If I keep my tattoos, I often think I will be CYA or in my way to Pelican Bay, or in a grave.

I always think of what could happen if I get shot at [illegible] the future and I have goals and dreams that I want to achieve, and these tattoos stop me from achieving those goals. I am a [illegible] person now. I am getting my tattoos removed because I don't want to be labeled by my style or the letters I just pray and ask God for the strength to do this everyday. I just hope that my [illegible] true. And I will [illegible] whatever it takes to [illegible] life.

-Lil' Los, Alameda

From The Beat: We hope that you do get your tattoos removed because we don't wanna hear about anything happening to you. It does take a lot of strength and determination to try to do good in life. But as long as you stay positive and have good intentions, good things will come.

A Fight For Her Life: To Be Continued

It's this girl I know so lonely and home sick
She got beat with some sticks
Left in a alley for dead
So fought for life but she was out numbered by four
Walking home from school didn't know what was in store
A car follows next thing you know they're dragging her as if it was cool
She screams, kicks, and fights, not knowin' what to do
Tryin' to get away with all her might
No one seen the hatred in her eyes or did they even care
cryin help no one was there
They raped her for seven days and seven nights
Drugged up she couldn't see the light
all she saw were dark shadows surrounding screams and shouts
No one would or could help out
This little girl will be found dead no doubt
All she can do is pray, pray that she'll get away
Pray for all her might.. but right now she's in the dark
Putting up a fight
....for her life...

-Tayana, Alameda

From The Beat: We hoped and prayed, reading this horrifying but beautifully written poem, that you were speaking about a metaphor, a story you'd heard, or something from your imagination. No human being should ever have to suffer this kind of pain and fear. If it was you – then we can only say that your continued positivity, strength, and talent in these pages is a true inspiration. If it was not you, then we still applaud your dark poet's imagination.

No one would or could help out
This little girl will
be found dead no doubt
All she can do is pray, pray that
she'll get away

Life Is Funny

When I think of life, I think of how funny it is, how one moment you think your in control, everything is going right and nothing is gonna stop you... and then life throws a curve ball at you and your dreams go sky rocketing to a chasm of death.

Life is funny. When I think of life, I think of all the good times I had and how they went sour with such a quickness, how I got locked up for doing the right thing.

Life is hilarious. When I think of life, I think of how many years I have lived in such a short time, and how my dreams are coming to me In spite of it.

Life's a joke. When I think about life, I look back on my pain and laugh, and look at the future and tremble.

When I think of life, I think of myself and what I have to give and what others have to offer.

Life's a trip, because it happens all around you, it's one big thing that orchestrates itself like a play, it's a hocus pocus of staying ahead of the game and doing the right thing.

Life's funny, 'cause I did the right thing and got locked up.

-Dawn, Alameda

From The Beat: Life's funny, because you never know if something is bad or good until some time has passed. For example, it's a bad thing that you got locked up, right? But if you hadn't gotten locked up, would you have had the chance to write this great, great, great piece, that made us laugh and shake our heads at the same time? Maybe being in here is keeping you from something else? Maybe that's the secret to life that you uncover here – it's a complete mystery, and we don't even always know if we're up or down or coming back around!

Life's a joke. When I think about life, I look back on my pain and laugh, and look at the future and tremble.

Life

Que-vo Beat, it's your homie Smokey from Hayward still in these ALACO walls. I still got 227 more days left. I just want to drop a little line to you.

To me life is like a dice game I'm either hittin' 7 or 11 and waitin' for the day to crap out, 'cause I'll be ready to take that ride. But then again life is precious but you got to live it to the fullest fulfill your dreams but at the same time take chances find love, feel anger, have depression whatever it is bad or good live it cause you only live once.

I wasted several years going in and out of jail but since 10 years old I've been gang banging I've seen and done a lot. I have a daughter. I've lived this life, but now I got to be a man! I have to change for that little girl I have to change for my own well being.

-Smokey, Alameda

From The Beat: Que-vo Smokey!? How are you feeling? Are you ready to change? Man that is a big step. It is very important that your daughter has her daddy around. How are you gonna go about your business? Are you prepared to ignore all the pressure you will get from your homies for not kicking it? How hard is it going to be for you?

Jade's My Life

The life I choose is with my sister Jade because she will stick by me no matter what. The first day I heard her tell me I love you was a shocking day. I couldn't believe what I heard. I tell her to stay in school and don't get in trouble. I help her with her homework and make sure she eats and get ready for bed. I always make sure she stays out of trouble and ask her how her day was. She's my life my little sister who I love a lot. I make sure she stays on track and not off like me.

I didn't grow up having someone tell me right from wrong so I make sure she know right from wrong. I spend time with her because no one did that with me when I was little. So I give my sister what I never got when I was young.

-Giovanni, Santa Clara

From The Beat: That's very sweet of you to look out for your little sister. You are a very good brother and your sister should be lucky to have you as a brother and vice versa. You should really stay outta tha halls so you can do what you were doing, and take care of your sister.

The Unspoken

Life is getting hectic
Locked behind a jail cell
Boe ain't living well
Can't even post bail
Its ugly
Man demons bug me
Ninjas think they hard so they try to mug me
I'm going insane in my brain
Like Rick James walking through the shadow of death
I feel no pain, ninjas might not understand
But I got my own plan and it's tucked in my waistband
Man, man damn that's all I could say
Until I see a new day
One day I'm gonna do me
Get out this jail
Stop being a Juvie
Fo' I get smoked like a doobie
Yeah I'm gonna do me
I'm gonna show ya
Two glocks in a hosta
Not doing what I was posta
Bussin' ninjas make 'em looked just like postas
Yeah postas just like I said high rollas
Folgers feel like I'm blocked in by these walls
One jaw
What should I do?
Turn to them or you
Can't trust neither cause everybody lond like speakers
Why you think we love our heaters
Got weight up on my shoulders
Get knocked down by boulders
Covered in four leaf clovers
No wishes, they still bitchin'
And you wonder why they still snitchin'
Kids growin' up in the world and gonna feel this shhh
They gone mess around and try to do this shh
I refuse to let my little brother go down da wrong road
I want my lil brothers to be like a king tucked in gold
real talk
Get outta line the banger gone spark
So chalk this one up right here up as a lost heart
broken
Heart swollen
You ain't hear this from me it's the unspoken.

-Boe, Alameda

From The Beat: It aint unspoken now that you have spoke! Nice writing. But why do you feel like you have to keep yo thang tucked on yo waistband all day? You want your little brother tucked in gold? How are you gonna get that gold? Are you gonna go the grimey way? Or are you gonna get a job, and work for it? If you get caught getting it the wrong way, would that gold be worth it. Is it worth risking your life for a gold grill, a gold chain, a gold bracelet? Are those materialistic things so important that it's worth risking your life?

Take Life Seriously

[redacted]

-Lil' Dude, Santa Clara

[redacted]

A Special Life

The life I value is my dad's. He would do anything [redacted] has been my strongest supporter. The problem is that I [redacted] ever treat him with respect, which is all he asks for. To tre[redacted] with respect would be the least I could do when I owe ever[redacted] to him. He's not sick or anything, but I'm worried he's gonna b[redacted] gone before I get to give him the respect he deserves.

So, dad I know I've been wrong. This ones for you.

-Friend Of Him, Santa Clara

From The Beat: You've said what must be done better than we could. If all your father asks of you is basic respect — and he has stood by you and supported you — then don't waste any more time disrespecting him. As you've said so well, he deserves much better from you!

She's The One

The person that I love instead of my family is a girl. The first time I met her was in 8th grade. She's a good person and she gets good grades. The reason why I fell in love with her is because of her personality. She used to always help me with my school work so I would be able to pass my class.

Now she is in the 10th grade and she is attending Burton H.S. The last time I seen her was about a week ago at the football game. Other than that I haven't seen her for two years.

Now I'm in juvenile hall and I'm not able to tell her how I feel about her. If I could get a hold of her I will tell her how I feel about her. This is how I feel about her: I will protect her from any harm; I will risk my life for her; and I will never lie to her.

What I see in her when I think about her is fresh air. When I think about her smell, birds, flowers and a beautiful day when I think about her beauty. When I get mad I just think about all the things I used to do with her to calm me down. It's like she blinds my eye sight with her beauty.

She is the light I see when I need to find my way out of this darkness place I'm in. I'm only fifteen years old, but I'm in love. Yes I am, and I'm not afraid to admit it. Some people say that I'm too young to be in love, but I don't agree with them because what I'm feeling for her, I know that this is love. No one — I mean no one — is going to get in my way for what I feel about her.

-That O Boy, Alameda

***From The Beat:** We love that you included so many details to describe your feelings for this person you love. Our only question is why you would risk losing someone so wonderful by doing whatever it was that let them take you from her...*

What I've Gained

Peace... Can't Live Without It

A Newborn Baby: Life

I'm Thankful To Wake Up Every Morning

Thinking about how to do better myself. Also finding new ways to deal with situations. How to keep myself out of trouble, such as new hobbies. I learn to think before I do. Because the decision I made put me in Juvenile Hall. I think twice before I respond, 'cause I love my freedom. And I know this place isn't for me. I know I'm a highly intelligent kid. The decision in the past wasn't right.

Now I learned my lesson and I never want to put myself back in Juvenile Hall. I learned that I took my freedom for granted. Juvenile Hall makes me realize I need to focus more on school.

-Carlito

From The Beat: You know the old saying, "Every cloud has a silver lining?" It means that even hard a-- reality checks and lessons, like doing time in the klall, can give you new ideas of how to live your life and enjoy your freedom. School can help!

A College Degree In My Life

One thing I'd like to accomplish in life is to get a college degree. I'd like to get a college degree to make my family happy and to show the people that doubted me that I can do something positive.

If you get a college degree, then you open up a lot of opportunities for yourself instead of limiting your possibilities. You can get a good job and make the type of money that you see people making on T.V. With a good degree you can do anything you want and help others in need. If I do make it to college, I like to major in music. But I think my down-fall is going to be the decisions that I've made to get me in the situations I'm in now. But I plan on getting there one day.

-Lil' Mikey

From The Beat: You are realistic about the fact that you have some work to do to get through your sentence and to gain the trust of your family again, but you also have dreams for yourself! Please show this piece to your RO. so that he or she can help you get back into school and on the right track. You deserve support as you pursue your goals. We wish you luck and hope you will stay in touch with The Beat.

What Life Means

[illegible]

Weather

[illegible]

Value Life!!

[illegible]

-Carlo

[illegible]

Hear My Cry

In this [illegible] I feel so alone
Thinking about all the fun times I had at home
I've locked up but my mind is free
This [illegible] little like a human sized cage
So me, here I can take out my anger and rage
So next time I feel stressed out
I can't wait until the day they let me out
I can't wait to see the outside
I'm cullin' can you hear my cry
My cry is not a cry with tears
It's a cry for the mind
I think of the choices I made all the time
The past is the past it's done now
I try hard to turn my frown to a smile everything I'm saying is a lie
I'm calling can you please hear my cry

-Young Mari

From The Beat: We hear your cry. You can tell us anything that you are feeling inside. The past is done and you don't have to keep thinking about the choices you made all the time. Just learn from the mistakes you made. Keep your head up and move on. You can't be dwelling on the past. You can start all over, and make some wiser decisions.

Life & Death

When I hear the word death I think about myself, about the things I been through. I think of myself as a cat with nine lives at the same time like a dog that's past through ruff times.

-Cat Dog Show

From The Beat: You shouldn't think of yourself as a cat with 9 lives because in reality you only have one. You might have been through rough times, and all but you gotta keep striving.

Representing Either Life Or Death

When I got my first tattoo I was just 15 and it was my cousin after he past away. He was shot down by a cop. Yeah, I was hurt and all but I just had to suck it up and bear with it. I loved my cousin to death but someone had to take his life.

-Lil' Dave

From The Beat: We're very sorry to hear about your cousin. Why was your cousin shot? What do you think made the cop feel like he had to draw his gun and shoot your cousin? What do you think goes through anyone's mind before they take someone's life. Nobody thinks about all the lives they will affect.

The System Can't Play This Life Of Mine!

My name is Mario I am a detainee at alameda county juvenile hall. This new building is so not fit for human that I cant explain this. It's made for a animal but I'm the one who made a bad decision to commit crime and be brought here.

Since I've been here I've been doing a lot of reading. I've been reading about all the rights that I had on the streets. All of them rights don't apply now.

And just to mention, my PO doesn't even know me and she thinks she got me all figured out from reading about my past.

Everybody can change and I've only had two chances. I failed the test so they feel I should be put who knows where. But I'm gonna beat this system and CYA is a set up cause if you're not with a group your gonna be a victim cause if you're not gonna be part of any group.

And when your with a group if they fight you fight and if you don't fight your gonna be labeled a coward. So if each fight is six months longer you have to do their main objective is to keep you there longer 'cause if nobody's there they wouldn't get paid.

See I know what they're doing I'm gonna keep the revolution going I'm gonna beat this system by being a person who knows what's going on. And there's no liberty and justice for all.

I found the hard way and the president sends people to Iraq to fight over oil but it's a problem here. It's a fight over turf. He doesn't care about Oakland he only cares about his neighborhood. If it was happening in his area it would be serious, but teenagers killing each other in Oakland don't matter.

-Young Mari

From The Beat: We're gonna start off by saying that the system can play you in many ways. We're not trying to say that you are gonna be trapped in there and you can't escape it. But don't ever think you can out beat the system while you are still incarcerated. First get out of jail, and then talk about beating the system. And your right, the President probably doesn't give a damn about teenagers killing teenagers in Oakland. But how can you expect someone else thats not from your city to care, when the same people from YOUR CITY don't give a damn. Personally, its not somebody elses job to be worrying about your city. The people from OAKLAND gotta care about the other people from OAKLAND in order for other people to care.

My Baby Girl – Another Reason to Live

How I felt when my baby girl was born. It gave me a real warm feeling in my heart to be there and watch my baby be born. It felt real good to hold her. It made me feel one more step closer to being a man.

It made me have another reason to live in this crazy world.

-Lil' Ju Ju

From The Beat: This is inspiring to hear, and meaningful too. We hope for better days for you and your family and your beloved daughter in 2008! Peace.

Life For My Family

I'll risk my life for my mom and dad because they did everything to take care of me. First, respect to my mom or carrying me in her stomach for nine months and when she was trying to push me out and popped her eardrum I'm sorry that she did that but she had to.

-Jahfanie

From The Beat: We are glad to hear that you respect your parents. Don't apologize for being born shh happens. Apologize for coming here. Get out and tell her how much you love her.

My Tatts

Gone get that skull head
Tatted up on my back wit' fire in his eyes'
Burnin' for eternal life or death I ain't cocky but I'm confident
So when you tell that I'm bad
I take it as a compliment
This is what I meant
I'm a bad man
Plus you know that I'm a charm under the skull head
I got grandmother up on my arm now that's my charm
And my charm gets all my respect
Then I got my mom and my sister name up on my neck
Now that's a fact now that's two tattoos
I'ma looking good
Rocking my jewels on my life
The only way I'm gonna get my beezy name if she my wife
After that I get my cousin Charles
Next to the skull head
Which represents the 7th ward (New Orleans).

-Boe

From The Beat: Do you have to be a bad man to have tattoos? Do you think that tattoos are only for hardcore people? Why do you ink yourself up?

Life

If I was to have a fresh start I would start at my house I would clean up my act up around the house I would stay off the streets and I would not fight.

- D-R

From The Beat: Well you can have a fresh start when you get out. What's stopping you? Your time is now. You already missed the opportunity. Don't miss it again.

In My Head

[redacted]

-Tiny Life

[redacted]

Risking My Life

If a had to risk my life for someone I would risk my life for my mom. life because I love her so much I'll kill myself in front of a car for her or anything. The end.

-D-R

From The Beat: That's sweet but we don't think your mama would want you to kill yourself.

An Unreal Life

Being locked up is like a nut hell
Like ten crazy females at a shoe sale
My life is unreal like a folk tale
I'm a messenger something like a middleman
I got feelings like the old school 50's milkman
I'm in jail waitin' for this time he to pass me by
About two weeks ago I was feelin like I wanted to die
Forget what you talking bout and where you from
ninjas talking that talk Sayin' they on one but can't
walk that walk

-Slick Rick Da Rula

From The Beat: You in jail waitin for time to pass you by?! Why dont you quit waiting for time to pass you up, and why dont you pass up time. Make something useful out of your stay here. Hustles don't just sit there and wait for the money, they go hustle and get it.

The Love Of My Life

The person that I love the most is my mom because she takes care of me. She is the one who gave me birth and took me to school everyday and on time. As I sit in jail she comes to visit me every visit day and she comes to all of my court days. She feeds me when I am at home and she supports my goals and all my dreams. She also buys me clothes and puts a roof over my head and keep me healthy as I wanna be. That is why I love my mom so much because she teaches me to love life.

-Deonte

From The Beat: Sounds like you have a beautiful mom. You're very lucky. Wouldn't you rather be at home eating your mama's cooking instead? Get outta here, go home, and show your mama how much you love her by not coming back.

The Good Life

[illegible]

-Individual

[illegible]

Life To The Fullest

[illegible]

-A

[illegible]

My Life, My Heart, My Soul

When I found out that I had a baby on the way, I was real excited and scared at the same time. But man, I am mad 'cause I ain't there with my baby mama to support her and be there... but at the end I know we good, 'cause I am gonna be there when she's born.

Man "God Bless" Juelz ... I am now the type of my life, my heart and my soul...

-Daddy's Lil' Girl Young Juelz

From The Beat: Heart, life, soul, there are the three things that matter most in the world. This little girl is going to love you forever. And you too. This love and responsibility, which you shared with us in workshop last week, is a bright light in a world that might feel dark at times. Thank you for sharing it with us.

Still Here

What's up Beat! Yeah, still here, waiting to get out. Man I am tired of being here. Hope I get out soon. Man, I am mad because they don't let me out, but I called my girl and told her that my mom already had the papers. So I'm sure was gonna call my mom, but I don't know what happen. Man I'm just waiting to get out to start a new life.

If I get a tattoo of the two hands of God and put a memory and put my sister name because I really love her and I miss her. She was killed.

-Ernesto

From The Beat: We are so sorry about the death of your sister. We hope that you do get out, and stay out. You've been in the hall for a long time now.

Lucky in Life

Life. What is life?
Life is the experience I process that we all go through.
Some of us value life enough to wanna live it.
Others wish they were never born.
Me, personally, I ain't got nothing to say- just that I'm fortunate to be here. I'm lucky to still have my family loved ones alive.
Lucky to have a girl that really loves me.

-Beaner

From The Beat: It's so easy to "count our curses" and think we all that is going badly in our lives, but this piece gives us all a kick where we need it, to remind us that we must count our blessings, and remember how lucky we truly are. Thank you!

Death Is A New Life

When I think of death, I think of closing my eyes for a split second and then opening them in a new life.

I agree with The Beat that being in the edge is selling drugs and packing guns in my opinion, that leads to a quick death. An' funerals, I learned that they bring out the real you – and take the best in you.

-Young Veloz

From The Beat: It sounds like this happened to you - did you go to a funeral when, even though they were hurting and going through a terrible time, people were also showing the best and truest in themselves?

Death and Stress

Death. When I hear the word 'death,' I think the world is coming to an end, 'cause I lost so many people in my family, it's not even funny.

Like now I'm kind of stressed out 'cause my great-great grandmother is really really sick right now. When I talked to her daughter, which is my great grandmother, she told me that she was throwing up blood and stuff like that.

So I'm stressed out that I'm not there with her. I just lost my grandfather last year. It's just making me do all this s***

I've been to jail three times this year, and I don't know what to do no more. Well today I got a wake up call from the judge. She said if I don't do right she gon' send me to CYA. So I'm goin' to stay at my placement that I'm going to, so I can get my life together.

I want to be well educated in my future go to college and work with kids autistic kids and make my world, my pride and joy. That song "Mama" by Boyz 2 Men reminds me of her. I'm goin' to dig this up like a rose, alright.

-Young Quezy

From The Beat: This piece starts on sorrow and ends on hope and determination. You have lost so many people that supported you and loved you, it seems like now it's time to reach out and find more support. The positive kind, not the kind you find in the streets. What does that mean? Well, staff you trust, programs that help, poems that inspire you, and, we hope, more and more writing your thoughts and feelings down on paper, the one place where if you choose to you can be totally free.

The Life I Wanted To live

When I was younger in elementary, and some of middle school I never thought that I was going to end up where I am now. When I was younger I had dreams of being a basketball player of being rich going to college. I still can go to college but anyway, everything was crushed when I first went down for something I didn't do.

Then I was introduced to hittin' licks, getting money, buying cars from that point on I knew this was the life I wanted to live. So I caught my first case and I said I ain't never doin nothin to get me back here...But we all say that.

So I came back and it was like a revolving door. I stopped playin' hoops started smokin' grapes, sippin' bo' ' pills, all this at like fourteen years old. But still I'm seventeen, one month from eighteen, and my life still ain't over.

So I still got time to turn my life around and do the rite thing so I can live life at. No worries.

-Lonnie

From The Beat: We hope you do change your life around, because what you've been doing in this revolving door is running in place, not running forward. You deserve a life where you can be moving forward, for real.

If I Got To Choose The Life I Wanted

[illegible]

-Hayley

From The Beat: [illegible]

The Deaths in My Life

Death is like I don't know.

Me I have been [illegible] my grandma and grandpa had passed away. I lost one child, and I lost two grandparents. Death in life is like very painful, and I don't know what could happen, but hurtful things.

I love my baby daddy so much. What I can do in life is change whatever that I'm in the wrong.

-Soloistra

From The Beat: Yes, there is still time to make your life good. What would you need, what are your dreams in life? What kind of job do you want? Where do you want to go to school? ...now you answer these questions, do you think it will be easier for you to push past the pain?

A Part of You Dies in Jail

When they put you in jail
A part of you dies
Somewhere a child's not the wind can't hail
You try your hardest to survive

When a part of you dies
A new one comes to life
And with the pain and strife
You try again to survive

That is me, the one in jail
The one trying so hard to prevail
I get back up, only to be beat back down
By the slam of my cell door
And the cold gray concrete

I realize I have died
Somewhere inside
I tried to stay alive
But I could not hide
That fun the truth of me
Gives me a new reality

[illegible]

-Dawn

From The Beat: This poem writes about dying inside, but it's written with so much life and heart! You've already plowed your way through the dark side of lockdown, because we see a woman already coming into focus! Tell us what the new you, the woman you are, is planning to do with her life.

RIP Mikal

Man. Mikal was my bra. We did hella shhh together that I ain't even gone mention. I really don't understand why he had to go.

Mikal was a good ninja. He stayed out of trouble but when trouble came he had to handle his. He did nothing but ride around on the three wheeler's or go-peds or scooter. He hung around me, his brother Percy, my brothers, the twins and all the youngsta in the hood. Bra you will neva be forgotten.

-Bra Bra

From The Beat: Thanks for letting us respect the memory of Mikal in this special issue. It's through your love and dedication that his memory stays alive through the years. Now it's time for you to live in his honor. How will you do this?

... you really have to go to school for you can be somebody, so you really have to wake up. Stop dreaming.

My life Happened so Fast

I can only say so much about life. Mine has happened so fast, I wonder -- will I give birth to a beautiful life when the time is right? And will it look like my life...

It means so much, but when you've never enjoyed yours, can you still say I have a life? Or should you say "I want to live the good life" because that's one of your dreams -- to live a good life.

Life. The good life to me means having a job and doing good for myself, staying out of trouble and going somewhere in the future, having a job and touring the world, sharing my life with others so they can get a feel for the way life should be.

Life is like a battle full of good verses evil but the good life is full of good things.

I don't know...

-Lil' W

From The Beat: In a way, "I dont know" is like the most honest answer a person could give, because one thing we know for sure: Life is a great mystery. Sometimes it feels like a punishment, sometimes like a miracle – and we don't get to go back in time to fix our mistakes, it's a one shot deal! We don't have answers to your questions, but believe us when we say, we spend a lot of time wondering about them, just like you do!

RIP Laura

[illegible]

Dec 27 – A Sad Day

My homegirl passed away a few years ago on Dec. 27. Her anniversary is coming up. I don't like Christmas as much as I did, because of her loss. I miss her a lot, she was my potna's lady. That was the first time I seen him cry. RIP Laura. You'll be missed.

-Dopey

From The Beat: This is so deep – death and destruction, they can take even take Christmas away. But we hope that for you, when Dec 27th rolls around, you let your good memories of her fill your heart. That is the only way to beat back the bitterness.

He Is My Life

[illegible]

-Arabian Goddess

From The Beat: We can see you have your own mind by the way it works overtimeare you lay down your heart in the words of this rhyme/but this man you've got if he cares like you say/why does he let you face danger each day/why does he let you make money on the block/knowing that each day could bring death's knock? He can't save you – even if he tries, you're the only one who can broke through those tears/set the lies from him but the ones you tell YOURselves you believe that the street is waiting for you.

Life. The good life to me means having a job and doing good for myself, staying out of trouble and going somewhere in the future...

Not Fadom, Not Big Brah

I was in shock when I heard. It never came ta mind dat Fadom would die! Shhh, real beast die some day, an' his came. Shhh, he made it far enough ta plant his seed. Damn hard ta believe... not dat he gone, but who did it. Yeah, one of da homies who I thought was big brah but now gotta watch him.

Now da 'hood all messed up; homies killin' homies. RIP Fadom and all the rest. Gone but never forgotten.

-Guan

From The Beat: When you put yourself out on those mean streets, you risk losing the most precious God-given gift of all: life itself! We hope the loss of your homie will make you think twice before doing the things that lead to such tragedies. (Sorry, we had to take a few lines out of this piece because they were not Beat appropriate.)

Free Me

This Friday is my court. Hopefully they put me on home detention. I miss my family so damn much. There is a lot of things that I needed to do but I couldn't because I'm locked up.

Example: I had a speeding ticket that I was supposed to go to court for it, but I couldn't go. Now I'm going to have to pay double the fine and get points on my license. That pisses me off! But I can't blame anyone but myself 'cause I got myself in here. But I can't believe I'm going to get a point on my license. Damn! ...

Damn! Hopefully I get out on Friday so I can take care of all my stuff.

-Crow

From The Beat: We hope that you learned you were going home. But whether its now or later, you will be out of here. The question is, what changes are you prepared to make so that you stay out

No More

[illegible]

-Darkness

From The Beat: Sometimes we don't give ourselves credit for how strong we are. We hope you realize that you are strong enough to overcome your addiction with or without help.

Start With School, And Don't Stop

[illegible]

-Young Boy

From The Beat: We're glad you've found motivation for school and are doing well. Keep your eyes on it! You are smart, don't ever let anyone tell you otherwise. Keep up the good work, and we hope to hear from you soon!

2000 Tons Heavier

Bein' I got wrapped for this 'cuz I-shhh, my legs was carrying 2[illegible] pounds.
But I know I was gettin' wrapped when I heard there's an arrest warrant.
A chance of life-style 'cause I'm back in the halls.
These small-ass 'bowls put'in' pressure on my balls.
All this for a gun...
I ain't 16 no more, I'm 2[illegible] tons!

-GB

From The Beat: We're not sure what you mean by 'bowls shhh,' but if you mean you were dumb to have a gun, then we agree... The weight you're carrying is called consequences.

He Keeps Me Up

Tattoo... I would get what I would represent, where I'm from and that's what I got right now. So that's how I do. But I would get some cross hands on my chest or somewhere, but I have to get that somewhere sooner or later 'cause I really believe in God. He really looking out for me and helping me stay strong and keeping my head up

-James

From The Beat: Does your belief in God keep you from doing some of the things you used to do on the outs?

Tattoos

Watsup, wit' The Beat? I'ma talk about a tattoo that I already have. But first, let me tell The Beat that this is the last Beat I'm writing, because I leave tomorrow at [illegible]. I'm not even able to read this Beat, because I'ma be gone.

So, my first tattoo ever was, -Sincere-. It's on my forearm on the left. The reason why I got that because it's my culture and I really like my culture.

My second tattoo was Susana which is my mom's name. And that's cause a lot of us, I got it the same day as her birthday. I love my mom. She's always there when I need her.

My third tattoo says, -Chunky-. Why I got that, I was drunk when I went to get that. But my fourth I'm a get it my 2nd on my neck. I feel the same way. I'm like my mom's that the end of my Beat.

-Chunky

From The Beat: We're really happy for you, Chunky. You've been waiting a long time. We hope you write us so that we can send you The Beat and so we can learn what life is like there. In so many ways, you are lucky: You're out of the hall, you have a mother you love and loves you and a father you love and loves you. Now, make them and yourself proud.

Life

Life for me is being free and doing what I want to do at any givin time. If yo' life is about comin' to jail back and forth, then you're not living your life, because every time you end up in here, you lose a lot.

If I had a life to choose for myself, I wouldn't change too much. But I will change a few things. So the people who want, keep comin' to jail. Then yo' losin' your life.

-Lil' Moe-B-

From The Beat: We like the way you're thinking. Only, what do you mean by "if I had a life to choose for myself... ? We think you do have a life to choose, and we hope your thinking helps you choose wisely.

Life

To me, I value my little brother's life more than anything and anybody I know! The reason I value his life a lot is because he is my closet friend, my best friend, and I would do anything for him. I would give my life for him. Life to me is worth more than the world itself.

If I could get a fresh start, I would have never skipped school and made sure that me and my brother was on time to every class. The life I would choose would be my own, I would only make different choices. I would risk my life for my little brother and my closest older sister and my girlfriend's life.

I would save my little brother's life because he's only 15 and he has his whole life ahead of him. I would save my sister's life because I cherish my sister and she's one of the people who took care of me and I know she would do it for me. Last but not least I would save my girlfriend's life because she's had a rough start in life, and she is willing do die for me. She's willing to pull that if I ask her to and that's why I'm risking my life for those people.

-G

From The Beat: To save anyone elses life, you have to make sure to save your own first. The best way to "save" their lives is to find a way to live with them without giving the system any power to take you from them. That means some changes, when you get out of here, because without those changes, you will just be wishing to help your sister and brother, but not actually doing it.

Thought Of A Taf

What's good wit' tha Beat? It's ya boi Lil' Spitta comin' to ya live from unit 4. I'ma tell ya a lil' bit 'bout a tat I'm thinking of gettin'. I gon have a representation of life and death. Tha top of my arm would start off with life — things like tha sun, sky, heaven and other living things on Earth. Then tha bottom will have a graveyard an' underworld with a Egyptian theme to it. I ain't fully thought it out yet, but that's 'bout it. Til tha next time I'm ghost like Casper and tha Opera Phantom.

-Lil' Spitta

From The Beat: Sounds like you've given this some thought. It also sounds like a complicated design. Do you know someone who can do it? Are you worried about if it hurts?

My Life

[redacted]

Tattoos Representing Life or Death

[redacted]

Today

What's up Beat? This Too Militant still holdin' it down until I touch down and touch rounds. But today topic is about today life.

Today life is getting crazier as the days go by. People are becoming weak minded and there are having that "I don't give a shhh" mentality. I feel that too many people are "brainless" there, and that's having a lot effect on people.

Another things is durin' this life that we live now people have something to give we don't that's life to live. I feel that if someone has something to prove, they should talk about it by doing quiet and not text, see their thing when win; the person they're telling should take it as it would never be. All I'm saying is if you invisible, be one can, 'cause they can't see you. If you stay safe...

-Too Militant

From The Beat: Of course, we agree that it's best to keep your business to yourself, especially of "your business" is dirt. But we don't agree with you that you can be invisible. No one can — especially when they're already marked in the system.

A Gangster's Live

Livin' life of a warrior ain't no joke
Dodging bullets, smelling gun smoke
Walkin' through the streets with a grin on my face
Praying to God dat I will live to see da next day

-Yung Casper

From The Beat: Praying to God while breaking His rules/Doesn't seem smart, doesn't seem cool/Since you're disrespecting Him, why should He respect you/(Is it smart to honor Him less than your crew?)

Man, life is priceless, it's the best thing given to you. When you're in jail, your life is taken, you just as good dead basically.

My (Abusive) Boo

Well, personally I kinda got a boo named Scout. Y'all heard of him when I wrote about him a minute ago when I told y'all he socked me in my eye and it was black. Well, it good now, but my eye still be tweaking though. But it good.

When I get out, he still gonna come home. And yeah, I know y'all thinking, "This gurl is stupid," but I'm not. I really love him and I know I shouldn't. What do you think beat!

-Hill Gurl

From The Beat: We don't remember what we told you last time, but we wouldn't let anyone blacken our eyes! There's an old saying that "love is blind," so we hope you're seeing things for what they really are, and not just what you'd like them to be.

Life, One Day At A Time

[illegible]

-Mouse

[illegible]

Life

[illegible]

-Mars

[illegible]

SANTA CLARA COUNTY

Time Lost

What crackin' beat? It's that true San Jo ner- Lil' Chris livin' and alive today waiting for a new chapter to unfold as a sit and wait to see if I'm gonin' to have a fresh new start by taking advantage of my diploma and by making babies with my lady for all the time that I lost, well, being in the Sta[illegible]

-Lil' Chris

From The Beat: We hope you wait to unfold that chapter that starts with making babies. Babies don't ask to come into the world, but when they do, they demand and deserve 100% attention and care. You're not ready to provide that — and, at your age, you shouldn't be ready to provide it. Give yourself a couple of years to build a stronger foundation before you launch the next generation!

Tatts Representing Life

If I had to get a tatt it would be a Samoan tat called "taullma" which is a Samoan art with different shapes and patterns around yo' hand. If not it would be a "sona'imiti" which is a tatt on yo' stomach down to yo' knees. This tat shows you're ready to enter manhood

-Big Uso

From The Beat: You writing for this issue educates readers to Samoan culture. Thank you for this!

Flex Life

What's up Beat? Today I'm going to write about life. As you all know, right now I am fighting a life sentence. Let me tell you this ain't the place you want to spend the rest of your life. You should be out there with your family making babies. Amen.

-Flex

From The Beat: Yes, you should be out there, but no, you should not be making babies. Babies should not be the product of your own selfishness — something you want — but should be well thought out and planned since (if you plan to be a father and not just a sperm donor) they required your full attention and focus. Keeping it real, you're not ready for that yet.

I'm going to have a fresh new start by taking advantage of my diploma

Life And My Mom

What's cracking Beat? This is Potatohead.

The life that I value the most is my moms. I value my mom's life the most cause she's the one that gave me birth and took care of me when I was a baby. Well my mom was always there for me and she still is, even though I be getting locked up and doing stupid shh. And that's why I value my mom's life the most. Well that's all I got to say Beat till the pencil hits the paper again late.

-Potatohead

From The Beat: We are glad to hear that you love your mama very much. But why are you here? Why don't you value your mom even more and stay the hell out of jail?

The love Of My Life

I value life, my homies, and family most of all, my girlfriend Destiny. It sucks 'cause were both locked up and she thought I would leave her side, but I didn't. She's the person I love the most I can see her as my wife. I would save her life from going towards the wrong direction. I love her but never told her how I felt, so I just want to let her know how much I love her and care for her, and I will do anything for her. So I love you Destiny and hope we can start a good and long relationship. So Beat can you please put my writing in the Beat please.

-Gadsden

From The Beat: You're writing is in The Beat. Your writing is always printed in The Beat as long as it is appropriate. This is a very sweet piece. We hope the best for you and your girl. Y'all need to stay out of jail so you can make your relationship work.

Life And Death Tattoo

A tat of life is above because you fly anywhere and be free. A tat of death is a death itself (the grim reaper). A tat someone can be a tat of death but that person is showing respect.

-Nacho

From The Beat: You didn't give us much information in this too-short piece. For example, what does a "tat of death" look like? How does a tat of death show respect?

Missing My True Life

[illegible]

-Andre

[illegible]

One Life

[illegible]

-Chino

[illegible]

I'm Just Ready To Leave

When I think of death it doesn't hit me anymore
Sometimes it feels like I was born into a war
So when I think of life I say "I was left to die, I'm to live."
I could already see my self-dead one, so they better start to cry.
Because I've already reached my peak
And everyone I love can see me six feet deep.
And all you guys know what goes around comes around
So you better live like a soldier before you hear that flat line sound
But still tell your mama one more time I love the gambler life
Even though I never thought twice to pull my knife
It's not only because I want to show that I ain't weak
It's 'cause I rather live on my feet than die on my knees
Not only am I a warrior running away from death I just want to breathe
So when you ask me "why don't it seem like you want to breathe?
It's not that, I'm just ready to leave.

-Goofy

From The Beat: Why are you ready to leave? Do you feel like you did everything that you wanted to do in life already? How does a look "why don't it seem like you wanna breathe?" Look like? Is it a look of despair? A look that says, "I don't care!" What makes you feel this way?

Saving A Life

Hey what's cruchin, Beat? Well today's topic is about life.

Life is a great thing whether you take the right path or the wicked one. Life to live truly don't stain ohhh. I'm in a place that takes all my privileges and breaks it to a shittier one. I would risk my life for any one in my family. It's hard to say just because I would for any one. I'm not saying I hate my life but it's not that important to me. I'm just another screw up, in my family.

I'm living this gangsta's paradise in San Jose. My whole mentality is messed up mind, no pity or remorse but to live my life to the fullest. I truly love it and I would give up on it. Fuck it. Fuck I just want to tell everyone out there to live their life 'till their whole full of it.

-LIL K

From The Beat: Why doesn't life mean shhh to you? Is it just because you're locked up? How do you think your family would feel if you were to lose your life? Don't you think they'd be sad? We can understand you saying that you would give up your life for someone you love, but to just give up your life for nothing is something else. Think about those that care about you else, you can't be totally selfish. There are people that want to see you succeed, do good, and live life.

Life And The Right Choice

Life is what you make it. It can lead you towards good or bad depending on the choice you make. My advice to you is to make the right choices. Who cares what other people think? If you think for yourself, you live longer. Play the game right, baby!

-Sevena

From The Beat: OK, sounds good. Better start listening to your own advice, wouldn't you say?

A Tattoo Representing Life and Death

I'm not really into tattoos, but if I were to get one I'd have to think about it a lot before I did it. It would represent both life and death because it would be my momma's face. She passed away 2 years ago, and I would do it in her memory. I would get the tat so she could be everywhere with me.

-Sg

From The Beat: Sounds like a good idea? Where would you put it?

Lovin' Life

I'm going to write about someone I love besides my family. The one person that I have a lot of love for would be my ex boyfriend, Dani. I mean I love this guy so much that I would give my life for his, if he needed it. When you love someone you would do anything for them, even if it means to risk your life. That's all I got to say until next time, Beat.

-Vivian

From The Beat: That's a lot of love Vivian. We hope your friends appreciate the depth of your love.

A Hard Life

Life is what you make it, so that's it for now. My life is rough and hard. You can die any day, any time anywhere. It is what it is.

-Juzette

From The Beat: Are you saying that you've made your life rough and hard? If that's so, then stop beating yourself up. Give yourself a break. Be kind to yourself. That means – stop doing whatever it is that makes your life rough and hard.

Life And Death

Life and Death
Last ones you can never forget
Live life like it's your last
Before someone ones don't kills your ass.
Everyone should live life to the fullest
For the ones in the streets, try and stay alive they're useless
One life, one Gods, one love
Have fun all day, we let's hit the club
We'll up a Dizzy, and give it to the hen
This is for all my dead friends
Who lived their life, and never thought of death.
Jay-Bay and Tookie
They is we will never forget.

-411 Friend

From The Beat: You're right! You only get one life to live so live it up. Nice poem. You live life and never think about death till it happens to somebody you know.

Life And Death

When I hear death, I think of someone is going to die or already dead. If there was that special someone that left me I will go to the funerals and pay my respect. I learned that when I went to the funeral people were sad and crying and probably wishing that they were still alive. Yes I have been to two funerals and that is what I see in people.

My friend told me he was walking down the street and someone people pulled a gun out at him and he said his whole life flashed before his eyes. No, I have never seen death. It probably feel sad when someone dies right in front of you. A mother or father must go through a lot if they lost their own child. They will probably wish it was them.

I have dealt with death like everyone is going to die some day. I value my family life because I just wouldn't want to see them go. For some life is worth a lot no matter if they're poor are rich. It's a great feeling when you're close to a newborn baby and especially when they smile at you our laugh.

If I was given a fresh start I will try to finish school and get a job. I will chose a rich life and own a big piece of land. I will risk my life to save my family just because they have a whole life to explore.

-Monkey

From The Beat: There are many interesting ideas in this piece, Michael. In fact, there are too many interesting ideas! Don't combine all the topics into one piece. Choose just one topic and write all about that. Anyway, we're glad that you haven't had to experience death up close yet. What do you do to keep yourself safe? Do you have anything in mind to change when you get out of here?

Life

Life is hard
Life is easy
Life is weird
Life is odd
But then life is
What you make it!

-This Life

From The Beat: This all seems pretty true to us.

Trade Your Spot

Yes I know a lot of people that are living more worst than me. I watch the National Geographic Channel and I see kids in Africa and Ethiopia who live more rough there than a lot of people who think there life is rough. They starve, don't have medical help, a lot are dying from diseases.

People who have it worst don't know what they have, 'cause they never take the time to think about stuff like that children in Iraq live in poverty, wars, are being used as weapons, trained to kill, they would love to switch places with some one in America. I think a lot about stuff like that I think they would love to be in my spot and we should not take their life for granted and would love to live our life, let's stop wasting our time.

-Tee-Kid

From The Beat: Yes, there are many young people who live lives unimaginable to most of us. However, too many of us do not want to think about this. What do you mean when you say, "stop wasting time"? Do you think people waste their time thinking about unimportant things? Clarify your point for us...

Life's Choices

Life is what you make of it. You make your own decisions. You choose the path you take. Sometimes things happen out of your control but you can decide what you make of those things. Like being locked up - you can decide to be depressed and sit in your cell all day, or you can try to make the best of it and maybe you'll have fun. So my advice to you is to stay positive! Keep ya head up!

-Crystal

From The Beat: Alright. You sound like a counselor. Maybe you should think about it. What do you want to do when you get older?

Something Valuable

Some ones life I value is my two year old son I love him to death. I will do anything for him whether it's just being there for him I sometimes sit in my room reminiscing about my son all the time trying to remember his cute baby face. And trying not to give too much about him and sorry about him because I know he's in good hands.

-Niko

From The Beat: We are glad to hear that your baby is in good hands. But wouldn't you rather hold your 2 year old son with your own hands? You say you would do anything for your son right? Then stay outta jail. Do everything you can to stay outta jail so you won't be missing your son.

Life's Hard

[illegible]

-Unknown Teen

[illegible]

Life Ain't Easy

What I think about life is that it ain't easy. You should live, laugh, love, party, have fun, cry, hate, and be who you want to be. Do what you have to do but, regret nothing, because at the end you will find out that's the way you wanted your life to be.

-Judy

From The Beat: Are you sure?

One Continuous Event

Life and death are not separate. They are one continuous event. You start dying as soon as you are born. And ask anyone who's just almost died, deaths presence makes life feel so valuable. Just think "One day I will die" this thought is chilling inevitably thought it is followed by "Damn, I'm alive!"

So what are you doing with your life? Are you happy, or do the things you have make you happy? Does it come from inside, or from that kingdom where "moth and dust doth corrupt?"

So as we go through life with these devils on one shoulder and an angel on the other, we've got to think about what we really value, and try to live with some integrity. And try to be happy.

-Monk

From The Beat: You're absolutely right about life and death! The thought of dying is chilling. We should be glad we're alive. We also should stop and think how valuable life is and really not wasting our time making it harder on ourselves or other people. You've brought up some interesting points. Are you happy with your life? Are you scared of death? What are you doing with your life?

Turning Point

[illegible]

-[illegible]

From The Beat: [illegible]

Fresh Start

Freedom of speech
Wealthiness
Kindness
Satisfaction
Honesty

Strength & courage
Trustworthy
Ambition
Reborn
Team Player

These are the things I would use in a fresh start. And, quit screwin' with these fact ninjas and stop selling drugs in these streets.

-Anna

From The Beat: Very clever, Anna. Thanks for sharing your desire for a new life!

True Feelings

Hey what's up Beat? Today, I'm going to write a letter to a girl that I realized that I love. Back at my first time writing to The Beat, I was heart broken because I thought I was in love; but after that break up, I realized that I still love the girl I was going out with a couple of years ago. I'm gonna start to talk to her and at least be friends with her, and maybe later on in life we can be together again.

-Nacho

From The Beat: The heart plays tricks on us lots of times. Do you think, if you were still on the outs, she would be so important to you? Would you be trying to get with her and respecting her enough not to cheat?

Life

[illegible]

-Kristina

[illegible]

Congratulations On The One Life

Hard to believe anyone would be
Evaluated for something judged
But everything's just compared to what
And you've already walking the road
That leads to what a free man knows
Of course I am talking about eternity
And hell mentioned
But wisdom carries heaven and hell
And makes hell's flames a cool place to dwell
So into the jaws of the system
The belly of the beast
You'll walk like a daniel in the lion's den
Not that set in the least
'Cause you know where you're going
And you know where you've been
Walk tall through it all my young friend
For wholeness if sin is just the beginning of your new life
Directed toward your chosen end.
As you begin learning what it means
To be Godsend
I put it much better
Just be your best and you'll endure.

-Father Time

From The Beat: You have some amazing talent. You are very descriptive. Who are you congratulating? What inspired you to write this poem? How were you feeling?

Educator

Let me extend my utmost love and respect to all who come across my words

Well as you all know and to those who don't I'm and "Educator." I'm known to The Beat as Educated Gangster. I try and do my best to help educate those who are incarcerated and deep thinkers. I don't know it all but I do know a good grip. And I urge all to help those in need of education.

Now, to steer your attention to situations worse than our own. Or mine at least. As youngsters we are suppose to be learning and unlearning things everyday. So, as I speak before those who have it worse off than ourselves, I apologize for our whiners cries over petty time. I know plenty out there, in here, and else where doing 10+ years and others, life. I'm always grateful that I haven't stricken out and put myself into a position that is frowned upon. But to those who are there, strive and educate your mind.

A lot of us are complaining about 6-8 months, 4 months, even 30 days' I got something for ya, "Shut up." There are others who would trade a spot with you in a minute. Just do your time and make it a learning experience. Do yo' time, don't let your time to you.

With that said, I exit this the same ways I entered, with my utmost love and respect. Stay educating yo' selves.

-Educated Gangster

From The Beat: What does it look like to "make it a learning experience"? It is easy enough to say, but what does the day-to-day look like? Many people do not see the larger picture of their life and the world, but how do people learn to see?

Value My Life

I only value one person in my life and that's this girl Kristina. I value her because she's the only girl that show me love and acts that cares for me. She's the only girl I call to talk to because I really don't talk on the phone but only to her though. But I can't wait to see her when I get out these weak halls.

-Eric

From The Beat: What kind of relationship do you have with this girl? Is she your future girlfriend, or she more like a sister? How much do you value her?

My Tat, My Life

If I was going to get a tat it would be a monkey doing a hand stand while eating a banana. I think it best represents life because life should be a lot challenging what people have to be true and not real.

Screw the gang life, selling drugs, or trying to be hard, care free, fun, give you that natural high with no repercussions. Truth be I was gonna get it on my arm before I did my leg.

I'm afraid I'll get a vulture because they feed on the death of others and they truly represent it. Though getting it would make me feel like I am one which would be sick.

-Jesus

From The Beat: We wish that everyone could think a little like you. We would almost live in a perfect world if everyone said screw the gang life, forget selling drugs, or trying to be hard. But then again, it wouldn't be real life. You're gonna have your ups and downs, negatives and positives. We can make the best of it, or the worst. What's your plan on getting out?

Life I Value

Well the only life I value is my own because no one else cares about me. Not my mom not my dad no one. So in this world I've been on my own since the age of 12. And there has been no one to look after me. I'm not tripping though at first I'm not going to lie I was sad and at the same time I was mad but then I guess I got over it...

I'm 16 now, my mom comes to visit me and I still love her the only reason is because she's my mom but that don't mean that I have forgiven her.

-Sergio

From The Beat: What happened that made you think that your mom doesn't love you? What did she do to you? You said you still love her, right? So what makes you think that she doesn't love you? She comes to the hall to visit you right? Don't you think thats some type of love? We don't know your sitoation, bet sometimes parents do shady things in the past because they don't know better. We all make mistakes even Moms, Dads, Uncles, Aunties, Grandmas. Thats part of human nature we still keep learning until the day we die.

Mom Puts Up With Me

My favorite birthday is when I get money from people. I love my mom the most because she put up with my shhh no matter what it was. I don't know what kind of tat I would get if anything I would get a skull just because I like the Raiders. So this is just what I think of death.

-Monkey

From The Beat: We're not sure what this has to do with what you think about death... But we do have a question: If you love your mom the most because she puts up with your shhh, then why do you give her shhh? Maybe it's time to be less selfish and start thinking

My Life In The Cage

They got me in a cage full of anger and pain
Ready to go all out for taking my name in vain
This is the real Manuel from this unit still holding it down
Haven't got my piece in The Beat magazine but still thinking about the crown
People love to put me down
You can try all you can but I bet you wont succeed
I walk with my head up high even though I'm in a two-man cell
Just got sentence with no bail
Thanks to my lawyer proved me innocent even though I was
Sensing the begging of time
Haven't seen my son in a while
Well Veat (alrato) later

-Manuel

From The Beat: We're sorry to hear that you aint seen your son in a while. Why is that? Is it the result from putting it down so much?

Grandma To'ieva

What's up Beat? It yo' boi Siaki droppin' through again. Well, I gonna be talking about life. Well, the person's life I value is my grandma To'ieva 'cause her life to me is everything. Well Beat I started late 'cause of a visit.

-Siaki

From The Beat: Well, since you didn't have much time to write this, we would love to read an entire piece about your Grandma To'ieva. Why does she mean so much to you? Is she still alive? What would she like you to be doing?

Life and Death

What up Beat?

Well, just the week before I got locked up, one of my homeboys got shot. He died right in the hood. He was on his way to 7-Eleven to get a blunt when a car full of rivals asked him if he banged. He said yeah, and what? Pop! He got hit once in the chest, died 10 min later.

He had his memorial the other day, and I didn't get to say goodbye. But he wasn't from my hood, just a homeboy that lived there. If I had to give my life to someone for them to live, I would have no questions about it. Maybe they have something to live for. I do, but for a whole different reason.

You see, I'm a gang member, and where I'm from, my hood doesn't like to see innocent people dying. If I saw a gun being pointed at a little girl or boy, I would jump in front of it. Or if my homeboy was about to get shot, I'd do the same. He was something to live for. I'm too deep in the game to turn back, or get out.

Gangbanging ain't the way to go, I know, but, I was raised into it, so I became it. My life is just as valuable as the next, but I guess I already chose the wrong path. RIP to all the fallen!

-Negro

From The Beat: This is a really honest piece but, sometimes, we feel like you "gang members" use certain ideas as an excuse. Yes, you were born and brought up in this life, but does that mean you have no destiny? It sounds like you are an honorable person, you want to keep people safe in your neighborhood, but perhaps you should try to take it easy and not take matters of life and death into your

Life

Life is life
It can be taken away
Death is death
It can't be taken away
Because there's nothing to take away.

-Anonymous

From The Beat: Nice poem and very interesting point of view! How do you relate Life and Death. Don't you think that they go hand in hand? Why do you think that there isn't anything to take away from death? Don't you think you can learn from death? Like learn a valuable lesson?

From Innocence To The Hall

[illegible]

From The Beat: As you look forward, where do you see yourself in five years? If you continue to do the things that have brought you back and forth into the system, how will you be able to avoid it in the future? Is going to prison a goal for you? If not, what are your goals?

A Tattoo Representing Either Life Or Death

What up, Beat? It's your boy, Chucky. I have a tat of my daughter's name on my left eyebrow. It says Corine and that is life to me 'cause she is my life. I love her. She means a lot to me. Why I got it was because she is my first kid and she has made a good impression on my life, enough to make me change. I haven't seen her in three months, so on Nov. 23rd I get out and get to spend my whole life with her and make up for the lost times.

- Chucky

From The Beat: Well Chucky, we hope your life with your daughter is going well but we wonder what your daughter will think of your other tattoo ... the one on your neck that reads "Never trust a b--h." It seems like those two are contradicting each other.

Life

Damn, ha-ha life! It's hella coo'l. I can't wait for my fresh start try to do good. Ha ha (psych). Naw I really just try to stay low and not get in any more trouble. Damn all I got to do is stay up.

Life is hard hell, but no one said it was easy. But it's all good all I got to do is run my own program and do what I got to do and stay out. Shhh, I got to get back on my feet.

-Ti

From The Beat: What will your "fresh start" look like? Will it keep you out of places like this? (Neither one of the two pieces you wrote tells us much 'cause you can't say much in two or three sentences...) What does it mean to you to "run your own program?" What do you have to do to stay out? Are you going to do it?

Stressful Life Full Of Poor Choices

Childhood was hard growing up in the projects
pops was always broke
no joke
Was introduced to liquor and coke
Marijuana came along the way at a very young age
I loved the smell of it
Pleasant
well as I got old started needing money
So went stealing stereos
that was lame though
Got tired of buying
so started selling
This is straight from the heart,
which tore me apart
And now look stuck in a cage stressing

-Mannel

From The Beat: It's hard to grow up surrounded by drugs, and poverty. But you know you can get money several different ways. You sound like a smart dude. Why don't you think about ways you can make money legally. Instead of stressing in that cage, you should be plotting. You ain't gonna be in there forever, and we're sure don't want to see you go back to your old ways. Think man, think!

The Gift Of Life

[illegible]

-Johnny

Valuing Life

[illegible]

-Christina

Take Care

When we are born and our parents (guardians) take care of us, our whole lives up until we are 18 or move out, then we get a job and our parents get old, especially when you are a teen, then it is our responsibility to take care of our parents like they have supported us through our early years. And not just throw them in a home and say screw them. But most parents are glad if their kids can just support themselves in this world and take care of those who have taken care of you.

-Justin

From The Beat: It is probably impossible to ever fully repay our debt of gratitude to our parents. There is no reason guardians have to take care children, and taking care of children is an incredibly difficult and lifelong endeavor. Your piece sparks an interesting concept regarding our debt of gratitude...

Teaching My Sons To Be More

Life is a beautiful thing that should not be taken for granted. I've seen a life brought into this world when my second son was born. I still don't know what I'd be in for. It was a beautiful sight to see. I seen what I created. It was crazy. I love both my boys to death. I would do anything for them all ones, right now life for them I just want to make sure that their life is great and teach them how to grow up and be successful young men and not to be like me but better than me in life. I want them not to be involved in gangs. They should play sports and be gentlemen like their father. Ya feel me bra.

-DaKid, Santa Clara

From The Beat: Wow, you get to be a father of two healthy boys. Many people do not get to enjoy this. How do you plan to teach your sons everything that you want to? Most fathers start out with that intention, but many parents fall short...

From The Beat: Going along with the theme for the rest of this issue, life and death, we decided to go through our huge pile of Beat Without writing and follow suit with this theme. What you will read in this section of The Beat Within are our writers speaking about both life and death, so be prepared to be blown away. We are grateful to be able to put together such a special issue, and even more grateful that we get to read what you've all sent. If we missed you, we apologize and will definitely publish your writings after our holiday break. But as for now, grab a cup of Joe or hot chocolate, sit down on your bunk, and receive the blessing of being able to receive thoughts, beliefs, and emotions from inside the walls. And until next year, have as good a holiday as you can and if you can't stand being locked up for the holidays, write about it and we'll definitely publish your masterpiece. With love and joy, this editor is signing off... By the way, We apologize to all you writers if we missed a specific detail in our intro to you, such as location, age, and if you are a returning or first time writer, given the person in charge of this section is not present.... Fortunately your words are powerful to stand on their own. Again, we extend our apologies to you thoughtful writers!

What Is Your Purpose To Life

Many people ask them selves this every day in life:

What is my purpose to life?

As the day starts up, minutes are running and the clock is ticking for the days on Earth not knowing what obstacles we might have to face or even what obligation we devote or self to

Many of us try to convey the dreams we have to life which makes to have a purpose to life. This all starts within yourself as a kid, when we started school So now whatever you put in to life is what you're going to get out of life. It's like a enlist to a military base, and you have straight discipline within yourself.

In order to have a set goal that you have set when you was a kid, it will take a lot of achievement that one must strive forward to be successful. You can be anything that you want to be such as a judge, attorney, doctor, even own your own bank

Ask yourself : Is this my purpose, to be locked up, a gang banger, a hustler on the go, a dope dealer or anythingof the life style you chose to live? People do what they do ... even young kids who get caught up in the midst of fire, not knowing what the repercussions are.

You have to face hurting your friends, loved ones who have let you drink and sleep on their couch, so now if you can stop and think of others. You can have a purpose to life as to change things around.

If we put people before ourselves, this is a blessing We will not get it right there or you to expect self gradnation.

But at least you know with in your heart you did it for a purpose, and not to eapect nothing A lot of people tell me that our life is real short, which is true But there is an old saying which a counselor told me, and that was to be kind to yourself and to not let no one get you down.

We all have a purpose in life. If no one think so, I am a prime example.

That's what I'm here today writing -- this I have never thought or begin I have or had a purpose to life now to elaborated and enlighten or to put you abreast a lot of people know me as bullet I have been going in and out of prison since I was 18 around the age 17 I was introduced to crank, known as speed or meth

I have had a lot of broken relationships because of trust issues. At the age of 18 I was in Vacaville. My roller coaster ride took me to Mule Creek, old Folsom and new Folsom.

I thought all this would have been a lesson to me The more I love the ride the more I strive for this adrenaline. And this all started in 1989, so what did I get out of this ride? A validation.

Then one day I poured water on this fire that was inside me. I had to stop and think, what is my purpose on life?

I still could not get a hold or a grip of it, so I continued to do what I thought was right, and that was to get high and ditch and dodge the police or the parole agent.

As I kept getting on this ride I got sicker and sicker of it. By this time I already had two beautiful girls, and I still just could not get it right or even know what my purpose to life was Everyone who know me or thought they knew me thought that I had lost my mind.

But to tell people the truth on how I lost my mind, I was asking myself 'what was my purpose to life' because I had lost my child to a desease called Rett Syndrome.

This is a disorder with no cure. I was losing my child and I didn't know when, but when she pass away a part of me had just died leaving me no purpose to live for.

I even attempted some stunts. On numerous occasions I jumped out of vehicles on freeways. I took an SUV, rammed it straight into a house and should have been dead on the impact. But somehow I managed to crawl under the engine, get out, and dance in the street like nothing happened to me.

I even fought with the renters of the house as well as Sac PD!

My purpose was to take myself out. But I'm still here, and for a damn good reason.

I tried to even do what was right before I started making my own stunts, not knowing how to cope with life.

I know this Beat Within publication goes out to strive for hope and inspiration for you.

Life most of all it's a spiritual helpful for those you don't even know we all have the good fundamentals to life.

As to what our purpose is to life? Early in this essay or breakdown of my own theory, I said that life is what you put into it. If you grew up in the fast life style, such as gang-banging, selling dope, trying to make a dollar out of 15 cents, some even prostituting -- now is the chance to make a change, to make a purpose to your life.

So now in the long run you would gladly received benefits to your life as well in community you can make your career to any purpose you strive for. You do not have to be a follower you can be a leader and an example to others or even save a life, so with my little input I hope some people soaked this up or I even helped them.

We do not have to be out down, because we all do have a purpose to life.

Respectfully submitted!

GREGORY VALDEZ

Gregory Valdez suffered the greatest loss there is in this life... the loss of his child. And he found himself literally dancing in the flames of hell (see for yourself) as he tried to drown himself in drugs and action and a purposeless existence. But Gregory has found something, in jail, that he now shares with The Beat: He discovered what it means to have a purpose in life, and how a purpose can make anything bearable. Read his piece and then ask yourself, as Gregory did, "What is my purpose in life?"

I Got Tomorrow

To the youth caught up in the system today – remember, you still have tomorrow.

So as you sit where you are today, think about how you will live your life when this is all over. Today is the time to set goals in your life for tomorrow because you will have choices to make. I know that there's good in all of us but we have to bring it out so others can see the good and they won't assume that we are looking for trouble. Instead they will smile as you find your way back to living a positive life.

While you are in the system, take advantage of it in school, and learn all you can so when you are back in the free world you will have a good head on your shoulders. We need education in order to make it in the real world, believe me, because if you don't use this time bettering yourself you will be back. How do I know? Because I've been there, caught up in the system and couldn't find a way out. It's no game. I started out in juvenile hall at a very young age and many years have passed by, and I'm still in the system. Yes, I'm in prison where life is so much different from juvenile hall. The game is over and every morning when I wake up I thank God that I have a release date, and I thank God for letting me find out about The Beat Within because The Beat Within really helps me stay focused. All of your stories in The Beat give me the chance to help give hope to the youth who are getting sent up state. Male and female, we are all in his together. That's why we must spread the word that we still have tomorrow. So be a friend today and let someone know that they still have tomorrow. Remember, your past doesn't have to be your future. Tell a friend!

Looking Toward The Future

Today we are forced to look at the choices we have made that got us where we are today. Even if you are in juvenile hall or CYA, it's not too late for change in your life. It's time to learn how to say I've had enough, regardless of what the homies think. You don't want to spend all your life locked up in a jail cell because you put in work for the home team so they would look up to you.

I used to think like that, wanting everyone to like me. That meant being tough, going to juvenile hall. The homies still weren't satisfied, so I ended up in boy's ranch. My family was hurt because of my bad choices, but not my homies! They just thought I was tough and wanted me to put in work. I did what they wanted me to do because I wanted to fit in with them. But you know what happened? I got sent to CYA and my family started asking me what was I trying to prove by being locked up all the time. I didn't have an answer for them! I just knew I was screwing up my life because I wouldn't change.

I know a lot of youth today are locked up from making poor choices or just trying to fit in with the crowd out there. That's how I got where I am today. I'm in prison because I refused to change. As a result, I've spent most of my life in the system. I don't want any of you believing you have to be tough or in a gang to be happy, because if you look where you are today, you can see being tough or cool in a gang ain't making you happy now! I miss my family and friends, and the people who truly care about me. They are the ones who know life is great when you live it right.

It's not too late to change because this time will be over one day and we get to prove to ourselves that we have changed. So today, start looking forward to the future and remember, it's a long journey ahead! But we will make it, because God is always watching over us. So when the holidays come, know that you are not alone. Food for thought: I am a better person today!

KEITH SMITH CRC, Norco, CA sent in the following pieces. Keith is from East Palo Alto and has spent most of his adult life in the prison system. He's spent a lot of time reflecting on his life, and now feels compelled to speak out to young people in the hopes that he can warn them about making the same mistakes he made. He writes with lots of passion and lots of heart.

A Message To Our Youth

Today there is so much peer pressure in our communities that we need to take a stand and let our voices be heard in the schools and in our homes, even in juvenile hall where it's really bad because a lot of you youth think you have to prove that you are tough to fit in with the peers there. But it ain't about that. It's all about letting your peers know who you really are, even at the after-school workshops. Let a friend know that he or she don't have to belong to a gang or sell drugs or break any other laws to be cool. Being cool is taking care of your business by going to school, getting involved in after-school workshops, even sports, so you start to see the real you and other people and friends see the real you.

I am from the Bay Area, and I used to think it was cool to hang out on the street corners late at night with my crew. But every time I went to juvenile hall or to camp the only one who really truly cared was my mom. I couldn't see that, so I kept on doing the same things. Before I knew it, I was in CYA, still trying to be cool. When I got out I was so blind from peer pressure that I kept blowing my life, trying to be cool. I've spent over half of my life in the system. I'm 48 years old and waiting to get out of prison. Life is too short to live it like this. Yes, I have learned my lesson, but look how long it took! I'm telling you this, hoping you will listen, so that you don't go through life like me, trying to take the easy way. The only easy way is the right way. Young men and young women, you can still make a difference like I'm trying to do today by warning people about poor choices. It's not too late. Remember, change is good even if you are sitting in juvenile or CYA. It's not too late to start making positive choices in your life. I'm doing it and I want to give back to my community any way I can because I know I will be helping save a life. So let your voice be heard and you will be helping save a life in your community. Remember, anything the mind believes, the mind can achieve – within reason! Tell a friend.

Life is All Right!

Maybe you're in juvenile hall right now, but life is all right, because we still have tomorrow to be a better person. It's human to make mistakes in life, but the key is to learn from the mistakes we make. A lot of our mistakes are from poor choices which means that if we set some goals in our life on how to be a better person (male or female) we will start to lean away from the street life and start getting involved with positive peers.

If we want to be happy we have to surround ourselves with positive people. I know a lot of us are tired of being away from our family and sitting in juvenile hall! It's time to stand up and take control of our lives because we believe me, the streets are full of dreams and one day we wake up and find out it was all just a dream! Don't spend your life dreaming because life is all right when you are doing the right things - like helping others understand how to deal with life's blows and by turning to a friend to talk to. At the end of the day that's what friends are for – someone to help you understand that you're not alone. We all have struggles and a lot of times it's peer pressure from the community because of all the chaos that goes on in a community. Sometimes we get caught up in it and start making poor choices.

Today, even in juvenile hall, life is all right because we are learning that we still have a future. As yourself this: How do I become a better person? We must keep looking up because God is seeing us through all of this, even the tears that we cry! Talk to someone about what you are going through today and I think you will feel a lot better. I talk to my friend about what I'm going through being locked up and it really helps. Even when your P.O. comes up, tell him or her what you are really going through and the goals that you are setting to better yourself so you will have a better future. As the holidays approach, just remember that we still have tomorrow and that's what makes life all right! Your past doesn't have to be your future!

Twinkies and Root Beer

A little boy wanted to meet God. He knew it was a long trip to where God lived, so he packed his suitcase with Twinkies and a six-pack of Root Beer and then he started his journey.

When he had gone about 6-blocks, he met an old man. He was sitting in the park just staring at some birds. The young boy sat down next to him and opened his suitcase. He was about to take a drink from his root beer when he noticed that the old man looked hungry, so he offered him a Twinkie.

The old man gratefully accepted it and smiled at him. His smile was so pleasant that the boy wanted to see it again, so he also offered him a root beer.

Again he smiled at him. The boy was delighted! They both sat there all afternoon eating, drinking and smiling, but they never once said a word to each other.

As it grew dark, the little boy realized how tired he was and he got up to leave, but before he had gone more than a few yards, he turned around, ran back to the old man, and gave him a hug. He gave the young boy his biggest smile ever.

When the boy opened the front door to his house a short time later, his mom was surprised by the look of great joy on his face. She asked him, "Son what did you do today that made you so happy?" He replied, "I had lunch with God." But before his mother could respond, he added, "You know what? God's got the most beautiful smile I've ever seen!"

Meanwhile, the old man, also radiant with joy, returned to his home. His son was stunned by the look of peace on his face and asked, "Dad, what did you do today to make you so happy?" He replied, "I ate Twinkies in the park with God." However, before his son responded, he added, "You know, he's much younger than I expected.

Too often we underestimate the power of a touch, a smile, a kind word, a listening ear, an honest compliment, or the smallest act of caring all of which have the potential to turn a life around.

People come into our lives for a reason, a season, or a lifetime. Embrace all equally! Take a few moments to thank the people who have touched your life in a special way. Give them a hug and let them know how important they are.

Have lunch with God!

He Keeps The Key

Is there some problem in your life to solve,
Some passage seeming full of mystery?
God knows, who brings the hidden things to light.
He keeps the key.

Is there some door closed by the Father's hand
Which widely opened you had hoped to see?
Trust God and wait- for when he shuts the door
He keeps the key.

Is there some earnest prayer unanswered yet,
Or answered not as you had thought 't would be?
God will make clear Hid Purpose by-and-by.
He keeps the key.

Have patience with your God, your patient God,
All wise, all knowing, no longer tarrier He,
And of the door of all thy future life
He keeps the key.

Unfailing comfort, sweet and blessed rest,
To know of every door He keeps the key,
That He at last when just He sees 'tis best,
Will give it thee.

HERBERT SCHWEIGERT

It is easy to maintain your faith and belief and hope when you are outside, surrounded by loved ones. But the true test, is can you still connect with that good feeling when bound by the dehumanizing walls of this system? Herbert Schweigert does more than pass that test... In the following writings he shows us what true inspiration can mean. This is about as much of a holiday moment as we could hope for.

I recall shaking, unwrapping and rewrapping gift packages from all of my parent's hiding places to see if I was getting all the stuff I put down on my list!

A Very Merry Christmas

I am determined this year to have a VERY MERRY CHRISTMAS! Regardless of my incarcerated circumstances, I am also determined this year to share the true spirit of the holiday with as many people as I can, Jesus! He is the reason for the season.

Sadly my earliest memories of Christmas were centered on the gifts I'd received. I remember every year in my youth I was on a secret mission to discover, hopefully in advance, what I was getting that year. I recall shaking, unwrapping and rewrapping gift packages from all of my parents hiding places to see if I was getting all the stuff I put down on my list! And did a lot of other bad things too.

But my life of "Christmas Crime" and crime in general all changed when I finally received Christ Jesus a real stand up guy as my personal Savior. For the first time in my life friends, Jesus became the central figure in my life during this holiday. Not Santa Claus, not Frosty the Snowman, not Rudolph or even presents.

Christmas was all about the greatest gift I had ever received from my heavenly father – A personal relationship with his son! My friends, the real Christmas story is an amazing tale of deep and profound love. John 3:16-17 in the Bible states, "For God loved the world so much that he gave his one and only son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but will have eternal life. God sent his son into the world not to judge the world, but to save the world through him."

Jesus' birth is an amazing story of how the Lord God would bring redemption to us, giving each of us the right and ability to receive Jesus as our Lord and Savior. Every year even here in prison, my joy grows as I enter into the Christmas season. I am no longer bent on trying to figure out what gifts I am getting for Christmas. I am now eager to un-wrap the endless riches that accompany a life surrendered to his Lordship.

My prayer for each of you wherever you are in juvenile, jail, prison, or at home, that this holiday season is that you try and stay focused on the gift of a lifetime, Christ Jesus himself. Enjoy the presents if any, the fruit-cake, the constant sound of Christmas songs, watching the latest holiday movie, the games, and whatever else you do or can do in your circumstances to celebrate. But remember to tell people about Jesus, what he has done for you, and how much he means to you – and don't forget to tell him too!

May His Love overwhelm each of you in the process!

Lastly, oh, and wish everyone a Merry Christmas!

Redemption

There came a day I lost it all, and couldn't see God's grace,
What was now gone, tomorrows too, all gone without a trace
I never saw it coming, no, I never saw a sign,
Blind, deaf and dumb, I wandered on believing all was fine
My wisdom turned to foolishness, my truths all turned to lies,
The day my light went out in prison, and darkness covered up my cries.
No one heard, and no one cared, no one even knew.
Time had ceased, all things changed, and nothing could I do.

What had I done? What was to be? Nightmare or reality?
I never dreamed that such an animal could become apart of me.
Endless days, and endless nights, of endless streams of tears,
In anguish like I'd never known devoured in hellish fears
I shook, I quaked, I cried, "Oh, God" for mercy I did plead,
A word, a touch, a ray of hope I desperately did need
And then from somewhere, out of sight, a whisper I did hear,
"Fear not, my lost and lonely child, for I am standing near."

I grabbed out like a drowning man, and felt His hand grab mine,
The current raged- it pulled at me but I clung to His lifeline.
And when at last, He pulled me out, and gave me life anew,
I found, He had a better life, than anything I knew
The joy I feel is like a stream, that never will run dry,
The peace I feel within my heart, comes from God on high.
Redemption is a blessing paid for, by His perfect Son;
I'm so thankful Jesus found me in prison, when I had no place else to run!

HERBERT SCHWEIGERT CONT.

A Mother's love

Long long ago: or so I have been told,
Two angels once met on streets paved with gold
"By the stars in your crown," said one to the other
"I see that on earth you too were a mother."

"And by the blue- tinted halo you wear,
You too have see much sorrow and deep despair."
"Ah, yes," she replied, "I once had a son
A sweet little lad, full of much laughter and fun."

"But tell of your child." "Oh, I knew I was blessed
From the moment I first held him to my breast.
And my heart almost burst with great joy of that day."
"Ah, yes," said the other, "I felt the same way."

The former continued, " The first step he took
So eager and breathless- the sweet startled look
Which came over his little face- he trusted me so."
"Ah, yes," sighed the other, "How well so I know!"

"But soon he ha grown to a tall handsome boy
So stalwart and kind- and it gave me such joy
To have him just walk down the street by my side."
"Ah, yes," said the other, "I felt the same pride."

"How often I shielded, and spared him from pain
And when he for others, was so cruelly slain."
"When they crucified him- and they spit in his face,
How gladly I would have, hung there in his place!"

A moment of silence- "Oh, then you are she-
The Mother of Christ Jesus," and she fell to one knee;
But the blessed one raised her up, drawing her near,
And kissed from the cheek of the women, a tear.

"Please tell me the name of the son you loved so,
That I may share with you your grief and your woe."
She lifted her tear stained eyes, looking straight at the other,
"He was Judas Iscariot, I am his mother."

Me And You

Me holding you, and you holding me,
together forever is where we will be.
Me kissing you, and you kissing me,
lips connected together, so tender and sweet.

You, love, and me are three of a kind,
very tight bond together combined
So, so, so close, just inches away,
just one more inch and forever we stay.

Me and you, you and me together as one,
from morning wake, to the disappearing sun
Through out the morning, noon and beautiful night,

LIL' CHRIS

Check out this poem by one of our favorite and most loyal writers.... He captures an eternal truth. Every great love story has three great characters: the two lovers and then the great emotion they share between the two of them which has a life a story and an energy all its own. That love is the part that's free, no matter how many walls lie between the lovers.

No matter what, when, and where, we will forever remain tight.

Me you, you and me, you and me, me and you,
No matter what the circumstances, weather
Its love, fun, business or just mutual

It's still me and you!

I Cry

I cry because I don't understand the mentality of our children today... I cry
I cry because I think about the society our children are growing up in... I cry
I cry when I turn on the news and see what the world has accepted as our society... I cry
I cry when I hear our youth talking about God...I cry
I cry when I see our youth wasting their lives in the streets... I cry
I cry when I hear out youth talking aback to their parents and other adults...I cry
I cry when I see and hear discrimination because of race, gender or beliefs... I cry
I cry when I see our youth hooked on drugs...I cry
I cry when I hear and see [parents give up on their children... I cry

SHAWN MONTGOMERY

Loving fathers watching a child grow behind bars. Parenting always means having to watch a beloved baby grow its own will, own ideas, own mistakes... but it's even worse when you're trying to hold on to a loved one from behind that locked gate – like trying to hold smoke in your arms. Feel Shawn's love – no less strong from being forced into distance. Then read "I Cry," and you will understand that Shawn feels for more than just his daughters, he feels for the entire next generation that his words are reaching out to.

I cry when I hear or see our children killing one another, and we keep quiet about it...I cry
I cry for the souls of our children...I cry
I cry when I see single Moms raising kids without a father figure in their lives... I cry
I cry everyday because the dreams, goals and excitement was violently taken from my friend
Antron-feel good- Barfield by a coward... I cry
I cry looking at the future of our youth... I cry

From The Daddy Who Missed Everything

I have two daughters. They say they look just like me. Correction, they say they look just like me, but beautiful, whatever that means. They love to tell me when people mention that. I don't get jealous because they are supposed to look better than me. Monique is 19 and Ardrana is three years younger than her sister.

They are teenagers now. Sometimes that's hard to believe. It seems like just yesterday that I was making sure their car seat was properly secured and that I had enough diapers in the baby-tote-bag.

My younger daughter Ardrana, the older she gets, the more I realize I'm in trouble again. Just last year I was comparing her with Olive Oyl, because of her stick-like frame. Now I can definitely see the outline of a figure, a small waist, hips, butt and breast. All of the things I hoped she wouldn't develop are slowly taking form. Somewhere I can see my ex-girlfriend reading this, laughing to herself and thinking, yeah Shawn payback is a b--! Ain't it?

My conversations with my younger daughter are a little stale. They pretty much consist of me telling her, "do good in school," "Daddy loves you" and "little boys are evil." I know I should start talking to her as openly as I talk to my older daughter, but that's my baby girl. I'm not ready for her to grow up. I mean, can't boy craziness wait? Does she have to throw Elmo so soon? I know I'm fighting a losing battle; but surrendering to Father Time is not an option, not yet anyway.

Maybe it's the guilt I feel from not being there for my kids during their formative years. Something inside me wants to slow the clock down in an attempt to make up for all the time I've lost being incarcerated. All of their birthday parties, step shows, Christmas mornings; I'll never be able to get these moments back.

It reminds me of what my daughters told me during a visit, "Daddy you missed everything." The confirmation of their words made the point hit home even harder.

The sad part about it is that I'm not alone in my absence. There are a number of fathers, without the excuse of being incarcerated, who are non-existent in their children's lives. They let things like their jobs, the street and women sidetrack them from spending time with the people that matter the most; the little guys and girls who look just like them and share their last name. I know because, like them, I also took for granted the idea that I'd always have time to spend with my children.

Now, as I watch my seed to sprout from a distance, I wonder where the time went. That is why it is important to show love and affection to your offspring whenever you have t he opportunity.

There are a number of fathers, without the excuse of being incarcerated, who are non-existent in their children's lives...

A Thought For Today

BRIAN K. STAFFORD We welcome

Brian K. Stafford who writes us the following reflective pieces from Corcoran State Prison.

Today I sit and look at my life up to this point. I look at the highs and the lows, the joy and laughter as well as the pain; the tears, which were shed when I was born, and the tears, which cried out when I was given a sentence of 33 years to life. None of these things can I change, nor can I rectify.

Friendship was once a gift that I gave freely, and those who I gave this gift were the ones who betrayed me the most.

Love, there can never be such a thing, considering all of those who claimed to be loyal. Where are they now?

Hate, what does it mean? I harbor none, for I can only hate when I am the object of attention.

Today these things went through my mind as I drifted off into a light sleep. I can't explain why, yet it is the answer that I seek....

Lost One

ADAM AZEVEDO *This piece is from Adam Azevedo who writes in from San Quentin Reception Center where has been for 10 months, still waiting to be sent to the prison where he will serve his time.*

Born two weeks early
Premature into this life
At the time I didn't know
This was the start of struggle and strife
A broken home can't describe it
Was never a home to start with
Mom and Dad living together
They just couldn't handle it
The streets called from a young age
The draw attracted me
I knew it was out there
And I couldn't wait to see
Crawling out my window
Up and over the back fence
Off into the night
Of alley culture and suspense
Neon lights shine
Bag ladies with no teeth
Calling me honey
Plotting on how to get me
Walking zombies
Left over from the crack age
Midwest girls turned hookers
Lost on the city stage
Teen runaways are my kin
Tent cities in the park
Gutter life had me addicted
From the very start
Sneak back home with the sunrise
School starts at eight
Coming home at all will end soon
You can't make this crooked life straight
One day I'm gone for good
I can hear the hurt in my mom's holler
The next bath I get
Will be in some massage parlor
Money's not a problem
You take whatever you need
16 years old and I'm living
At life's highest speed
Caught up in a rut
At such a young age
When I eventually do sleep
I'm kept warm by a sports page
New kids come
Jus as quick as they go
Living lost, caught in the ebb
Of life's ruthless flow
We all use drugs
Whatever high we can get
Lost in the hustle
Trapped in the street life's net
Friends don't last long
Together one day, the neat we are partin'
Just yesterday
I saw my best friend on a milk carton
His family loves him
And they'll never stop the search
We don't want to be found
For them, that's what really hurts
We could have been anything
Gone to college and had fun
Some wanted to be all-stars
I guess I just wanted to be a bum
Begging for quarters
For just a bite to eat
In the rain who needs shelter
I'll just skip another night's sleep
Some sell their bodies
But all have sold their soul
Searching for a life's dream
A family, to be made whole
One day I see a family
Both parents and all
Knowing I can have a home too
With just one humbling call
Maybe I'll call Mom
With my very last quarter
I walk to the phone booth
Only to find it out of order
I guess it's a sign
I fall asleep in a bus stop
Left alone by the tourists
Awoken by a street cop
"Keep it movin' kid
You can't sleep here!"
I spin off down the street
To go steal me a beer
I drink the beer down
In an alley behind a strip club
Just another example
Of money being life's true love
A girl gets off early
Asks me to walk her home
It's dangerous in these streets
For a pretty girl all alone
We walk through the fog
My empty stomach makes this walk seem long
Other kids our age in a limo
Pass by on their way to their prom
What could have been
Was lost in the street scene
2 kids seem so old
To be only sixteen
I'll sleep in a bed tonight
The first time in 9 weeks
But this girl doesn't sleep
She's skinny because she tweeks
She offers me some dope
Party for my birthday
I almost forgot
I'm 17 now but who cares anyway
She passes the needle
I've never tried this before
The high is euphoric
I won't be the same anymore
We use into the morning
I'm lost in a haze
Who knows?
Maybe this will be the first of many better days
I start to remember home
Mom's cooking that green bean pie
Birthday cake and presents
Seem to have just floated by
Birthday parties and video games
Friends in the backyard
Who would have thought
I'd choose a life so hard
At least she's got my little brother
Maybe he'll make her proud
He was always a good kid
Runs with a good crowd
They probably don't miss me
Life gets busy enough
Besides it was always my fault
Whenever their life got rough
But now that's past
Keep my mind on my next meal
Will I be able to beg
Or will I have to go and steal
On my way to the store
My stripper friend comes to my side
She's been sobbing and crying
She looks broken inside
I ask her what's wrong
She says it's hard to explain
I tell her "let it out"
I would probably feel the same
She cries and says she's just left the clinic
I feel her pain and see she's afraid
She says she got tested
And just found out she's got AIDS
To be continued...

Who knows?
Maybe this will be the first of many better days

Song Of Sorrow

The Beat plays on.

Sweet melody that pulls my heart strings. Invoking a melee of profound thoughts and tangents.

The horror of love lost- disrespected emotions, twisted, tortures soul.

Eyes full of bitter tears and bitten back words that were swallowed like poison.

Forgotten memories found only through pain, now cherished and coveted.

This is my song of sorrows.

Poetry In Motion

Smoke filled room with swirling over head fan. The clink of frozen water in my glass. I sit, and watch as the brite spot light settles on the lone figure on stage.

She sits, on redwood stroll, reciting her love into leaning mic stand. My eyes play across her youthful face, skin unblemished, yet mature and sexy. This liquid pools of brown that are her eyes. The arch lips, the flashes of white teeth, as her poetry is set free to mingle in my mind.

So beautiful, o delicate, the cadence of her voice and flow holds me spell bound. Her eyes scan the crowded tables, finally to rest upon me. I smile, a smile from my heart to convey the thought, I'm feeling you. Her flow falters yet only I hear, that unperceptible change in pitch, that recognition of love seeking love. And in that instant, in a smoke filled room love found love, through poetry in motion.

At the end of her verses she stood amongst the snaps of fingers and heart felt praise. I stood on shaking legs and prideful chest. My mind playing the phrase poetry in motion. You see I love that women and the way her words echo in my brain yes I love that women filled with passion love and pain.

To Whom It May Concern

Do you you know what it is to be a sav? Is it not givin' a ...? Smashin' at all costs? What? I thought that's what it do.

Now, I m not so sure. I've changed quite a bit from the person I was on the streets. I no longer bang, smash for a number or color, use drugs, or act like a bully. I try not judge others- though it's hard sometimes- based on where they lived or who they associated with. I don't see every small slight as disrespect to be handled with force. I've always considered myself a family man (good father, attentive husband) and an emotionally invested in my relationship. It was my reason for doing good, coming home, changing all my old patterns.

Well, my relationship is deteriorating. I can't give her the physical attention she needs, and she won't give me the affection I crave. No letters, no reassurance of love, no attempt to go the extra mile to show me we are in love, nothing. I'm not content with a visit once a month alone. I'm not a back up plan, nor there just when it's convenient for her, no matter how much she professes she loves me at our visits.

I simply refuse to believe someone who loves me can't spend .41 cent on a stamp and 15 minutes on a letter once a month. Am I not worth that much? So, it's over. And with it, my motivation for going home. Ever. Why should I overlook those who step on my toes now? What's there for me on the street that I should overlook debts owed to me and allow people to take advantage of my kindness?

It's easy to revert back to a thuggish attitude. To keep my heart calloused and shove people away, not allowing anyone to get close enough to hurt me again. Why not be feared and respected in prison? I'm a lifer anyway right? Shouldn't I just "sav it out"? What can you do to one who has nothing to lose? Might as well give up and give in to a gangsta mentality, right?

Actually... to me, that's not a savage, that's a coward. It has taken this to waken me up to it. Giving up and giving in is simply quitting. Hiding from life and all its risks. Lacking the courage to do what is right. That's the very definition of cowardism. And I am no coward. A sav is one who strives, even when there is no reason to keep struggling on. Someone who refuses to give up. I refuse to give up. I refuse to break or be conquered by this prison, my misfortunes, or my heart. No matter how much I want to – and God knows I want to – I refuse to quit on life, on love. I'm going home one day. Whether it be 18 years from now, or 35, I will go home. And when I do, I'll shine. That's a sav.

ROBERT LACEY You can lock up a body, you can lock up a future, you can lock up assets. But can you lock up a man's voice? Robert Lacey says no. Lacey uses his voice to share his pain, his love, and his beautiful "Song of Sorrows" with The Beat Within and its readers, and even though he sings of sorrow, his skills as a poet and his openness of heart lift us up with joy. Read on to see why.

My Voice

Today I found my voice among the multitudes. Rising, ringing its unique cadence to the masses.

Troubled waters, reflecting the turmoil of a seeking soul, tossed to and pro in its search for home, for something greater than it's self. Reaching for a higher plateau of understanding of self and the plane it inhabits.

Bound by the flesh, yet still shinning exquisite in its metamorphosis. It's many facets still reflecting experiences and learned lessons, shared easily and freely.

I watch in rapt fascination, unable to feel anything but bursting admiration, a sense or awe at sharing in it's sharing, and knowing that, I too shall soon become something more than the sun of my parts.

Through The Pain

Again I open the pages of memory and thought, in order to bring my emotional keys to bare against your heart.

I struggle to find the right combination to open your soul. Though we are kindred in spirit, your resistance is testament of painful past; of unsuccessful love.

You were your heartache like battle gear. Your compassion like a blunted sword. Your heart frozen behind a steel veneer of mistrust and cynical thoughts.

Your wit has crushed lesser men, but I see your soul trapped, yearning for release. Your passion, still burning within the ice of your pain.

I seek only your freedom

RAY SANCHEZ JR. Another bullet to the heart from the mighty Ray Sanchez.... After you read this truth-telling powerhouse of a piece, tell us whether or not you think you are a true "Sav" according to the way Ray brilliantly redefines it. "To Whom it May Concern" he says. Does it concern you? Thanks Ray! We miss hearing from you of friend!

Your Love Was My Escape

Lost in love with you. You are my only escape out all this pain and misery amongst lives greatest doubt.
By abandoning myself, I've given you all of me to hold,
prisoner, captive in chains, or as a dove set free.
Searching for an escape, I'm convinced you're my only hope.
An escape out this evil, I can no longer cope. Though,
your love and heart proclaim neither belongs to me,
How compelling would your words have been and set free.
By yielding all of me, I've yielded the power to destroy.
For amongst your love would have escaped your baby boy.
My need for you to say don't go and you love me,
Went unnoticed, for you didn't and I went and now am unable to flee.
Lying here I realize love has the power to rescue or destroy.
For I yearned for you to rescue a now forgotten baby boy.

Running alongside the wind, my soul would be free,
No more chains of captivity, only the wild and me.

Wild Horse

If I could be an animal I'll be a wild horse,
Lost in the wild, free from life's tragic remorse.
Running alongside the wind, my soul would be free,
No more chains of captivity, only the wild and me.
Amongst nature I'd run and play all day,
Under the sun and moon which in time fade away,
No more tears, no more fear, amongst my face and heart
Welcome joy, welcome happiness, please never part,
Playing in the wild, journeying on lives beautiful course,
If I could be an animal, I would be a wild horse.

CLARENCE REESE Wow... This next writer, who's writing from the California Correctional Institution in Tehachapi, CA, blows us away with a short, but tremendous poem titled, "Wild Horse." We thought it was tremendous because with each line we could picture a horse running wild and being free to do whatever it pleases. And to be all the way honest, we found ourselves wanting to be wild horses too, but only after reading. This is the mark of a very fine writer because he not only shared something with us from his thought process, but he also put us in the exact same place he was in when he was having these thoughts. He ends one of his two remarkable poems by saying that inside him is a "new forgotten baby boy." But in the poem he brings that boy, and that boy's tears and hope, back to speak in a voice we can't ignore. If a life lives only in a poem, does that make it any less alive? We recognize his extraordinary writing talent and we know you will too.

True Wisdom I'll Forever Hold

I've fumbled and stumbled along this road
Held lives flame for warmth, yet remained cold.
My destiny was written before my birth,
No audition for this part, just part on earth
Many wasted talents left behind this bitter taste
A tread of love, pain and misery embraced.
What creator creates a misleading way?
The soil nurtures the seed that's pedals the wind casts away.
Fighting invisible forces that always win,
Captivates the should no longer determined to begin
Branded rebel is the intellectual or common sense fighter
No longer blinded or easily manipulated his ways are brighter
What form of death welcomes no soul?
Live for the moment for the next who may know.
Mental prisons constantly built, you choose to enter
Chains remain physical for the strong mental contender,
Minds penetrate walls; they're the key to heaven
He, who limits, passes no clouds or stars to reach heaven
Cries of weakness is another's laughter and pride
The misinturpitation of weakness devastates the pride
I've fumbled and stumbled along this road
Now true wisdom I'll forever hold.

Scars of Reality

The time I've wasted is my biggest regret, s
pent in these places I'll never forget...
Just sitting and thinking of the things I've done,
the crying, the laughing, the hurt and the fun...
Now it's just me and my hard driven guilt,
behind a wall of emptiness I allowed to be built...
Trapped in my body just wanting to run,
back to my youth with it's laughter and fun...
The chase is over there's no place to hide,
everything is gone including my pride...
With reality right in my face,
playin with guns is a whole new case...
Now memories of the past flash through my head,
and the pain is obvious by the tears I shed...
I ask myself why and where I went wrong,
I guess I was weak

JAMES DAVIS We'll let our loyal reader James Davis speak for himself. To you young writers who give us your best in workshop... read his introductory note and remember that when you put your hearts and souls in our pages, there are readers like James who feel your hearts beat and then feel their own hearts beat to your rhythm.

When I should of been strong...
I pretended to be rugged, so fast and so cool,
actually I was lost like an ol' blinded fool...
I'm growing out of this tiresome game,
of acting real hard with no sense of shame...
What the future holds I don't really know,
but the years I've wasted are starting to show...
I just live for the day when I'll get a new start,
and the dreams I still hold deep in my heart...
I hope I can make it, I at least have to try,
'cause I'm heading toward death and I don't want to die!

From The Beat: The following POW Throwbacks are taken from our website from over the years. Enjoy!

Reflection #9 by Vincent, posted Nov 30, 2005

Saturday, September 10, 2005 — Music, I love music, R and B mostly, filled to the top with expression in song! The first time I noticed how much I liked music, I must have been like seven or eight years old.

I remember, it was the day after the Notorious BIG had been shot. My foster sister, Maria, didn't like his music, so when she heard he had been killed, she put on some R and B. I can't remember exactly what song it was, but I can remember standing at the bottom of the steps, listening. The words floated down and met my ears, making me pause from playing on the phone.

Then as I got older, I got my own radio. I would listen to Black Street, Darnell Jones and Dru Hill. The words to these songs touched me in some type f way. I would sit by my radio for hours and listen to the same CD until I learned every song on the album.

When I was a St. Vincent's, I began trying to sing. People would tell me, "Vincent, you can sing!" I never really believed them. Then I found myself at a group home called "Starlight" in San Jose. The group home was co-ed and had a school, pool, gym and field. It was sort of like St. Vincent's, only without the horses and open land around it.

At Starlight there were always programs to attend. As soon as I was moved from Juvenile Hall to Starlight, that very same day, I was asked what I liked to do. I told them I liked to sing and to write. I was told that there was a talent show happening, and I was asked if I wanted to be in it. Hell yeah, I wanted to be in the talent show!

There was a kid there who had some CD's and a little portable CD player which he let me use. The song was by Tupac and Jon B. — "Baby, Are You Still Down?" I practiced for two weeks, making sure I had all of the words right and was on beat. I had to make a good impression! Slowly the day of the talent show drew nearer, and I grew nervous. I had never sung in front of a whole bunch of people I didn't know. Plus, there would be girls there listening. I was really nervous!

The day came, and all of the staff, kids and workers from Starlight, filled the cafeteria, plus some families of others who were performing in the show as well. I sat in the back of the room and watched, as one by one, kids got up on the makeshift stage to sing or to rap their hearts out. That day I wore a brand new pair of Sean John jeans with bleached patches and a matching shirt, a pair of wing tips graced my feet, and my hair was freshly cut, lined and waved. I was looking the part! Now all I had to do was play the part.

When my name was called, I didn't hear it! My mind had floated away, and when they called me by my middle name, I didn't even hear it. Somebody nudged me, "Hey! They called you!" I stood up, slowly walked to the front, handed the DJ my CD with the beat to the song, and took the mic'. The beat started, and I looked at the sea of faces before me. I couldn't do it! "Go, Ray!" said a girl named Lydia who I was talking to — what was I going to do? I couldn't just stand there and look at these people looking at me!

So, I turned around, turned my back to them all. The base line dropped. "Left once again at home ... another night on your own ... ain't no fun in lovin' if you do it alone ..." Slowly I turned back around. My eyes closed. "Girl, it's all right ..." I was already halfway through the song when I opened my eyes. The first face I saw was Lydia's, he month hung wide open, just like everyone else's! I smiled and continued to sing. "Girl, it's all rinight, baby yeah." As I ended and the beat died, the cafeteria erupted into applause! Everybody was on their feet! I felt so good that day.

"Boy! You need to be out there making records with that voice!" said a parent as I walked back to my seat. Everyone wanted to know how I learned to sing so well. I couldn't tell them. I guess I learned just by listening and singing all the songs I listened to. I knew I could sin, but not that well. I mean that day I knew I really had — have — a talent for singing.

I started singing more, and, since I love writing, I wrote some song lyrics. I wrote a couple of songs and sent them out to music labels even though I didn't really expect anything to come of it. You couldn't even imagine how I felt when a year and a half later, I received that letter in the mail! I sat in my cell on August fifteenth, reading a book, when I heard something getting pushed under the door. I looked down to see an envelope with my name on it. Thinking it was a letter from my mom or one of my girlfriends, I got up slowly, marked my page, stretched and picked up the letter off the floor.

First I looked at the address. "Who is this?" I asked myself out loud while studying the postmark on the envelope. I opened the envelope gingerly so as not to rip it nor the letter inside. As I pulled the letter out and unfolded it, I could feel my eyes grow big. "Special Recording Contract of the Month," it read at the top of the page in bold letters! Slowly I read the letter, not just reading but absorbing each word. "We'd like to get you into the studio, free of cost ..."

I finished the letter and couldn't help but jump for joy! "Yeeahh! Hey yeah! Wowww!" I yelled as I danced around my cell! The letter had noted that if I did not contact the people at the studio (Edice Studios, to be exact), that my file would be terminated after three weeks. Now I knew there was no way I was going to Florida to record an album, but I had accomplished something nevertheless! Somebody in the industry had read my writing and wanted to help me join the music scene!

I was not upset about not getting into the studio — I was happy, so very happy. Down the line, one day I could say, "I do write music and am known!" I just sat there in my cell, reading the letter over and over again. I gave a copy to my lawyer to show to the judge and to the district attorney. When I went to court, the judge and the DA saw the deal written out in black and white. I had talent, the revelation of which (along with my many publications in The Beat Within, as well as the story I've already related about what happened to me, more than once, in the "care" of the system) weighed heavily in the DA's decision to pull the legal motion to charge me as an adult! I love music, to say the least!

I called Sayida. She is really playing games, but we talked and she seems like she is at least ready to give a playa a chance. In other news, Juvenile is quieter than usual. There are only four people in "Boys' Control". It's deserted down here. It's feels like all my peers are gone, which underscores my feeling that it is really time for me to leave this place! I am the last of the 2000 crew! After I leave here there will be a whole new crew — and they don't have any idea of what is in the future if they keep on messing up (like I did)!

A new Alameda County Juvenile Hall facility is being built, and it will be much different from this one. There won't be any acting out or fighting — they say the new Juvenile Hall is supposed to be like Santa Rita. I just hope that at some point these youngsters cans top messing up the way they keep doing, because the way the system is starting to tighten up, it's all bad!

Oh, Moms is really eager for me to get out. I can't wait to see and feel what family life will be like on the outs living with my mom! I never thought I would be this close to my mother — she was always so distant, but now she is right here for me! I am always so happy to see her smiling face during visiting time. She was in such a good mood today, a very good mood. I also spoke with Cassandra, but then the scan went off. We were having a civilized conversation one minute, then the next, I was being pushed off the phone!

I hate this place so much! This was never a place for me, but I allowed myself to get sucked into the system — this crazy cold-hearted system that preys on young minorities! I hate it so much! The public defenders are corrupt, and so are the police. I wouldn't be surprised if the judge had a part to play in all that happens. Innocent people end up in prison for twenty and thirty years because of a crime they are merely suspected of doing! Families are torn apart!

Wow! I have so much on my mind right now — like, George W. Bush! What is wrong with that man? Does he even understand how much he is effing up? All of the people that have died because of what he, and only he, believes! He needs to feel war, real war, up close and personal — like the war people face everyday when they wake up in Oakland! The war that is being fought on our own doorsteps! A war where it's everybody against everybody else! A fight for survival "of the fittest" in the streets where drugs, money, sex and violence rule!

There are no rules to the war in the streets — it's all or nothing!

People turn up dead almost every other day! Little children caught by stray bullets! Mothers scorned! Fathers on crack and daughters selling their bodies for men who don't even respect themselves! Sons who are trying to feed their families the best way they know how, not knowing that his every move is being watched until the moment when they (the "system") put him in hail and he becomes yet another number, another source of dollars to those who run the prisons.

I have seen mothers cry because their sons or daughters fell victim to a society built against them. I've seen people shot and the gunmen just walk away like nothing ever happened! Seen people no older than fifteen beaten because they didn't give the right amount of money back to whoever it is they were selling for! Seen young women walk the street at night when they should be at home ding homework or talking on the phone to a friend about work, school, boys, etc.

Bush has seen none of this — all he knows is what he hears from his advisors. As a result he doesn't know anything about our reality. He thinks he knows everything but he doesn't anything about the war zone I live in, grew up in, twenty-four/seven. And like on nine/eleven, he can run away and hide whenever something goes wrong in his protected world. If somebody were to try to shoot him, he is well-protected at all a times. If somebody tries to shoot me, it's either I allow my life to be taken or I choose to be the one to take a life!

Survival is the name of the game, I guess, and Bush is like the one pawn that always stood in the background until the board was clear enough for him to stroll down and become the most powerful piece playing. He may be queen for a day, but at the end of the game, everyone has to pay. And when he faces his Maker, what will he say? Before the throne of God — lies don't play!hem home. That will hurt anyone!

Life of a Teen by D-Frank, posted Aug 08, 2004

It was hot outside. Summer was finally here. All year, working away in those classrooms, finding job after job, stressing over all of life's little extras. How would I pay for the senior trip? How much money was in my pocket? Where was my girlfriend? — normal things that we all worry about on a day-to-day basis.

But everything seemed to be getting better. It was early May, and I was ready for summer to start. Summer has always been my favorite time of the year, next to Christmas. Anyways, this summer would be great! It was my last summer before I would be a senior in high school. On top of all this, I was ready to become an adult, I was going to be eighteen in June.

I wasn't practicing with the football team this year, due to my back — I had fractured my spine during my JV season. So, pretty much, I would have a lot of time on my hands to make money, and, even better, to spend it. Yet I was disappointed when I knew football had fallen out of the picture. I always thought I would go somewhere with that.

All right, back to what I was saying. This summer was looking good. My parents had finally gotten off my back about working, due to the fact that Applebee's Restaurant hired me as a server. So, I was set: great girlfriend, good job, ready to turn eighteen.

Then, right when it all was feeling right, everything collapsed on me all at once. It was the weekend before school got out, and it was probably the biggest party of the year. I saw all my friends, and people I hadn't talked to in years.

I really just thought of having a good time that night, so I did. And, being there at the party, I drank. Harmless, fun night, just normal kids getting ready for summer, celebrating the end of the school year. And, hell — with the success I had been having lately, I thought I deserved it.

Well, the night went quick, and it was time to leave. I had already downed my last drink several hours before, and I thought I was fine to drive. So, I drove some friends home, and didn't get into trouble doing it. Then I arrived at the house of one of my friends, and he was insisting on going back. "There were still so many people there! Why not just hang out a little longer?"

I kept resisting, saying that I was low on gas, I was tired, I just wanted to go home. But none of these things mattered to them. In truth, I really just didn't want to drive and risk getting caught up. And they kept on. "We'll give you gas money. You'll be home in a little while, don't trip. What's one more hour?" Eventually, I gave in and decided to take them back.

Well, we got within one hundred yards of the party, and there had been a car accident. The roads were blocked, and it wasn't like there was another way in. We were pretty deep in the country, and this was the only road going there.

We stopped and looked to see what had happened. It wasn't nobody we knew, so I turned around and started driving back. As I pulled out, my friends were laughing and shouting at the people who crashed — stuff like, "Dumb ass!" And "Learn how to drive!" But I paid no attention. I was ready to go home.

One of my friend's older brother, was behind us on the way back. He had just left and wanted to follow me, for directions. Well, he began to flash his brights and sped up behind me. Of course, he was just messing around, but it was kind of nerve-racking at the time. Then my friends in the car started shouting, "Lose him! Step on it!"

I started going faster. And that's when it happened. I saw a car turning in front of me, and there was no stopping what was about to happen — I was going to crash!

It all happened so quick, but when it was over, all I heard were the voices of my friends yelling at me, not mad but scared. What were they supposed to think?

The only thing I could think of, was to check on the other driver. I was not expecting what would happen next. He wasn't awake.

That's when I felt it hit me, about the worst pain in my life — not physical. My mind had been put in a blender and switched to liquefy! And I began to panic, not knowing what to do but to help this young man out of his car.

I picked him up in my arms and carried him to the sidewalk. People were standing all around me, ears pulling over to see what happened. I asked for a phone, and I called 911 for help.

It has now been almost three months, and I'm still locked up. But before you go on reading the rest of my story, I want you to stop and think for a moment, really think.

Ask yourself: How long does it take you to make a choice that can change your life forever? I'm not going to preach to you about doing the right thing. No, that's not going to help. And I know that most of you reading this story, probably don't think twice before some of the decisions you make.

I'm guessing that most of you would have told me to run. Well, that's not who I am. I won't run from my problems. I would stand face to face with the devil if I had to, and wouldn't give up faith!

Because faith is all I have right now. I lost that job. I left my girlfriend. I messed up my family. I lost my license. And someone is in a coma. How long did it take? — About ten seconds, when I decided to get in my car.

But no matter how long I'm here or how badly I'm treated, there is one thing that nobody can take from you — your faith! Today I'm sitting in my bed at Camp Sweeney, looking at life from a different angle.

We, as teens, do not value our lives as we should, because we live for the moment, on the edge of our seats. We should all try to make the best of our lives. You never know when it is your turn to die.

I'm grateful to be alive, to be here at Camp, to know what I know, and to have seen what I've seen. But you see, that night, I didn't get lucky — no, there is a reason I'm not dead. I was put in that car and was meant to be at that intersection at that time. God has very weird ways of telling us things. Sometimes we don't recognize them as signs, mistaking them more or less as just bad luck.

My life was looking good from my point of view, not His. I was living in the fast lane and running with it. I didn't care what people told me. I was stubborn and didn't like to listen. Now I sit here, telling you to listen up! It's almost funny how fast we can flip the script.

I just want you to be thankful for everything, even if you're locked up — the shitty food, the hard beds, the same old clothes, everything. Because it is all happening to you for a reason, believe it or not!

I wish all of you who have read this, good luck in whatever life has to give you. And to all of you readers and writers of The Beat Within, hold on to your faith — one day we'll all be free!

My Life Story by Lil' Chris, posted Feb 23, 2005

Well, hello again Beat and Beat Readers. As you know, it is Lil' Chris from San Leandro. Just going to drop a few lines out there to tell you my whole life story or should I say almost my whole life story.

Well this is my life and how it began. My mother and my dumb stupid ass father made love, or should I say they just had sex. Because I find it hard to believe that my mother really loved his lowlife dumb ass in the first place. But anyways, they had sex and my dad's sperm broke its way into my mom's egg and which later on formed me, Lil' Chris. About 9 months later, my mother was laying in San Leandro Hospital screaming her guts out having me. Eventually I popped out of my mom's belly. And I came out screaming and hollering, I was all bloody and shhh.

But the day I was born, August 28, 1988, I didn't know I was going to live a living nightmare. Well at the age of one I was living in San Leandro. I really don't remember where... By the age of three I moved to San Lorenzo with my loving caring joyful great grandma which became my mom or should I say my real mom. The mom my mom should have been to me besides going to jail and running for drugs. Oh yeah by the way my dad was in jail at this time too.

But by the age of four I was still living with my great grandma Nan, aka Elsie M. Thompson. Sorry for not explaining. Through the whole year I can't remember the stuff I did when I was one to four. But at the age of five years old I could remember I was in my rolling rocker, the ones you sit in and your feet touch the ground so you could roll around. Well anyways, I was a bad little boy and I liked to roll really fast and ram right into things. I don't know why, probably because of lack of attention from my real mom. Don't get me wrong, I always had a lot of attention from my grandma Nan. Or should I say my real mom Nan. Well one day when I was five years old I was rolling my rocker really fast and went straight off the garage steps. It was only three steps but I landed straight on my head. Oh yeah, I remember that like it was yesterday. That is all I remember doing at the age of five.

At the age of six I was still living with my grandma Nan. I remember we did not have food to eat every day, but at the times we did have food it was because my loving Grandma Nan had to call the church for some food. It was called a food box. And on Christmas and Thanksgivings my grandma Nan always made miracles. When I was little, I used to think, how did my grandma get all these presents for us. But now I know she used to call the church and the church gave us presents. But to me all the presents were from my grandma because if she did not care about us she would of never called the church so we could have a good Christmas or Thanksgiving. Well let me get back on track.

Well, one of the things I remember when I was six I used to put nails behind people's tires so they would get flat. And one other thing is I used to put potatoes in people's mufflers so when they would drive off it would shoot out and hit the car parked behind it. Ha, ha, ha. That's not all. I used to throw rocks at cars on the freeway. I thought that was the funniest when I was six.

But by the time I was seven, I did much worser things that I thought was fun. But I ain't going to get into that because that would be giving you guys too much information. But I could tell you a couple of things I did. At the age of seven was when I first got suspended from school. What for? For bringing a knife to school and pointing it at somebody. That was the first time I got suspended. Let me think of some other things I did when I was seven. Um, oh yeah -- at seven I crashed my "first" car. Well I know what you are thinking. How did you reach the pedals at the age of seven? Well, let me tell you. My lowlife dad used to sit me on his lap and he would control the steering wheel. Well let me make a long story short, and tell you how it happened. I was on his lap, and he started to yell at me and I was getting scared. So he started to speed the car up a little so I got scared and turned the car wheel and we crashed right into a wooden fence. And guess what? I got the beatin' of my life. I could remember that like it was yesterday. But I could tell you one thing. I bet his punk ass won't put his hands on me now and I'll bet ya.

I could go on and on and on about what I did when I was seven, so I am going to cut seven short and go to age eight. Where should I start? Well at the age of eight I was still living with my loving Grandma Nan, but yes like always one of my parents was in jail. And the other one was chasin' drugs. And yes we were still hungry getting supported by the church. And we still had poor clothes and shoes. Some of my shoes had holes at the bottom. And our house was dirty because my grandma was getting too old to watch all five of us. Well let me stop this because I could go on forever about the conditions I was living in. But anyways like I said, at the age of eight, was when I first got expelled from school.

Do you know how it feels to be expelled from school in the third grade?

I got expelled for the same thing I got suspended for the first time I got suspended. I brung a knife to school and pointed it at a girl in the fifth grade and told her to get in the boys bathroom. I am going to stop there for right now. Well I did not only get expelled from school but from all the San Lorenzo Unified Schools. They made me go to school in San Leandro. And one more thing I did when I was eight was, I started a big fire, bur I am afraid I can't tell you where or when, but I did. That's all I am going to tell you about me and my bad days when I was eight. So let me go on to nine. Well this is the age I got caught up in the system. So listen closely, DK?

I had a best friend named Steven. Steven was about 14 years old at the time. So me and my best friend Steven started to do some of the things my big brother was doing. We was getting pretty good at it, till I caught my first case.

Now I was only nine years old, getting charged with strong-armed robbery and possession of five stolen firearms. Well when I got caught up they sent me straight up to Juvenile Hall. Which when I got there I did not know I was going to come back 12 more times.

Well when I did come here for my first case I ended up staying about ten to eleven months I had my tenth birthday in here, but what I did not know was that I was going to spend four more days in here later on in the future. Well, I ended up getting out on EM, after a long ten months in Unit 1.

I was only ten years old, so after approximately a week and two days on EM, I caught my second case, a house robbery and a violation of probation. So at the beginning of ten I was on the way back to 2200 Fairmont Drive, Juvenile Hall where I presently sit right now.

Well I was fighting my case in the Hall, doing nothing but dead time. I ended up staying in the Hall for another eight and a half months, which made me have my eleventh birthday in this messed ass place. Well after they figured out what they were going to do with me, I ended up going to a foster home which was not a very bright idea. Well the foster people ended up getting beat the hell up by my big brother and I ended up on the run for the first time in my life. Well, I remember I was not on the run for very long before I got caught up. Well at least I got to have my twelfth birthday on the outs for real.

Well at the age of twelve years old I was still sitting in the Hall too. They found out what they were going to do with me. Well they ended up putting me in a group home, which was again, a bad idea.

Oh yes, I think so....

Sorry Beat readers, I got to cut this short for right now because I ain't got enough time and enough paper so please look for part two of "Thug Life" story in the following week's Beats. Well this is Lil' Chris from San Leandro. I'm goin' to be letting you go till pencil meets paper.

Much love and respect Beat and Beat readers, that is real. I would like to give a shout out to my home and friend Arlene Mitri, who works at The Beat, much love to you girl and thanks for the books, I'll holla.

Thug's Life Part One is dedicated to my dead grandma Nan aka Elsie M. Thompson, my real mom. You're never forgotten...

What My Life Is All About by Josh, posted Jul 08, 2005

This is a part of my life. Even at sunrise, I turn on the TV and I watch the news. I see how police pick up another injured body. No one has a clue about how I've been feeling during these past couple of years.

The memory is still fresh in my head. I have not been able to forget that scene, in which, on that fateful morning, I discovered my mother dead on the floor and how her clothes were full of blood and how I knew she was not getting back up ever again. You have no idea how it feels like to lose your mother. I can't even write how I feel on paper. I wish I could go back in time to the day when I was born so I can leave behind all the bad things that I've experienced in my life.

Oh how I would love to laugh, cry, and sing for the world so I can forget about my situation. I would cut school because I didn't have any friends because I hated everyone. As I walk down the streets with my headphones pressed to my ears, listening to black people rap, I carry my weapon by my side at all times.

Some thought I was crazy and others would laugh at me. By mouth, it appeared that I had failed my mother. It is very sad what takes place in between shots behind the gun smoke and people walking around always armed, disdainfully firing shots in alleyways. Why are we killing each other over bills on which it is inscribed, "In God we trust?" My money on my mind and my mind on my money. Why forget about who one is over money? Why does one have so many friends when one has money? Why do you all of a sudden have so many enemies when you're out looking to come up? Why do bad people always beat good people?

I remain seated at the stairs watching how the kids kill each other and that's where that rapper comes from. I wish I could go back in time to the day when I was born so I can forget all the bad things that have existed in my life.

My Brother's Letter From Iraq

by Rich, posted Jan 04, 2006

I just recently received a letter from my brother in Iraq, which made my day but left me worried. The letter was a little depressing and a little bit of things that made me smile.

My bro wrote me and told me he was part of the invasion of F-Town (a code name for Falluja). He is starting to get a lot of combat time now he is in Falluja. I am really worried. He said he has seen a lot of intense shhh that makes him look at the world differently. He said that he has shot at and been shot at with small arms and RPGs (rocket propelled grenades).

My brother sent me a coin which he carried with him after he almost got killed. While on patrol on LSA Anaconda he almost got hit by a mortar which knocked him to the ground. The coin was right in front of his face and he picked it up and kept it for good luck.

I thought my bro was fine and to not worry about him. But it now seems he is in combat and in harm's way most of the time.

I love him so much and I hope he comes back home safely. That letter which my brother and I always say, "Spending time is a moment we will always remember, if not, then maybe material things." He told me to promise him to keep the coin till he comes back. That coin was his good luck and he gave it to me. Since he gave me his good luck and he is my brother, I will keep that promise.

I Give My Life To You by Rio, posted Nov 18, 2003

(dedicated to Mya Wilburn) life got me askin' this question
how can something so small
yet so precious
leave this world in a matter of seconds?
she left me with not enough memories
an' a handful of misery
i should've died
'cause this here is killin' me inside
lookin' at my niece's body
layin' lifeless
i don't wanna accept it
an' i sure didn't like it
it just hit me that she's no longer here
fa me ta hug an' kiss
i will no longer be able to see her display
that pretty lil' face
what a day
tha world done took anotha one
of my loved ones away
i pray
an' just ask
that my family be okay
we all in desperate need of god's strengthenin'
so much anger buildin' up inside of me
caused by this messed up world that we' livin' in
it got me grievin' again
an' once again
made me a victim ta life's lesson
they say ya must count ya blessin's
but every time i start to count
one is taken
steady breakin'
my heart which is already shattered ta pieces
my soul is weakened
got me stuck just
thinkin' an' speakin' ta this paper an' pen
i'm turnin' up bottles of hen'
fa therapy this here is tearin' me apart
i know death is all a part of life
but why must i go thru so many in just one life?
a baby girl wit' a smile so bright
she brought a lot of light ta my dark life
so innocent ta life
an' its constant hinderin' a life short-lived
but she touched a lot of hearts while she was here
it's so hard ta keep my emotions from explodin'
but we got to keep goin' we can't stop here
'cause this here ain't it she'll be truly missed
an' hard to forget it's a trip
'cause mya was here just tha other day
i had her laughin' an' tryin' ta talk wit' a big kool-aid smile on her face
i'd give my whole life up just ta love her
an' touch her at least on mo' time
as humans our time on earth is not infinite
i look at tha two months she was here as a true blessin'
an' i just hope that i'll be able ta see her face in heaven
it hurt knowin' we gon' have ta lay my lil' mama down in tha earth life seems ta have no worth when ya got a lot of love an' nobody ta give it to i not only dedicate this poem ta you but i dedicate my entire life ta you mya we love you! uncle rio

Life In The Ghetto by Crazy, posted Mar 08, 2006

Life as it is, life as it was
pimps pimpin' hoes
these little ninjas run around wit' guns
single mothers on welfare every corner packed
by their sons and daughters who don't care
surrounded by so-called soldiers
who build stripes by buildin' up their criminal folders
for every day in the week
another ninja meets his peace
while his brothers and sisters rush the streets
yellin' r — i — p
waiting fo' their time to be set free
but until then life as they know
it is weighed by the kilos and gees
life in the ghetto you'll see one — two — three

What's Life Worth by Sho-Mac, posted Jan 14, 2005

What's life worth? Well, I guess it depends on whom you ask. If you ask a suicidal maniac — it's worthless. To people with a family, it's only as valuable as their family.

To others it has a different value. To me, my value of life has jumbled around, just as the quality of my life has jumped around. Like right now — my value of life is medium. I mean, yeah, I am not that bad off. But I could be doing so much better!

I have so many opportunities knocking at my door — jobs, schooling, like all kinds of opportunities, just waiting for me. Yet the reason my value of life is so low right now, is because I know my life could be so much more better.

Because of these decisions I made a couple of years and months ago, I am stuck behind these walls and windows, writing. But there were times when my value of life was much higher, not long before I started to make horrible decisions.

As I walk my journey through life, my value of life becomes more. I am starting to realize the pricelessness of life, because everyday it gets a little better. Even through all the up's and down's, the quality of life gets better because I learn of it's value — like having a family, living a real life, having friends, becoming a man, finding the meaning of life.

Yet what's funny is how I always knew these things. I just never paid attention! Yeah, I've always talked about living a meaningful life, having a family, a job — but I always thought of myself as a child, a boy. So I thought I had all the time in the world to become a man.

Now it has already come! It snuck up on me, just that fast. My grandmother always told me, "Mijo, enjoy your childhood. It's only a short time." She was right! And I didn't even listen.

Some of my friends are always talking about junior prom and proms, high school dances and these good times they have! What do I talk about? How many times I ran from the cops? How many cases I caught? Whom I am locked up with, and all the other old stories that I done told a hundred times? Show them the scars from my life of turbulence, and they laugh!

But at what do they laugh? Is it the story or me? Some of them help me, while others just pretend to be friends — and yet others keep their distance, knowing too close can get them burnt! And I can't blame them. I burnt myself and my friends! But I am changing. And I am starting to show care for what happens to me. Day by day I am that much closer to the life I want. I got my life on pause right now, but soon it will be in play — and once again I'll be playing a game called life! What's it worth to you?

Health 101 by D. Jamal, posted Apr 26, 2005

Chlamydia...
Gonorrhea...
Herpes...
Genital warts...
Just to name a few
Sex without a condom
Can lead to STDs (Sexually Transmitted Diseases)
And even worse, AIDS (HIV)

We are now 20 years into the HIV epidemic in the US.

Women make up nearly one quarter of AIDS cases here in the US and are among the fastest growing group of new HIV infections. Worldwide, women make up nearly half of AIDS cases, and thousands die everyday around the world from AIDS related complications. It's a shame that out of those women, it is our younger age group 18-25! Why? Why can't we just wrap it up? It's not that hard; all it takes is five seconds! Latex condoms every time you have sex prevents pregnancy.

Abstinence — the best way to go or have sex with one person "monogamy." Make sure your partner doesn't have STD's or HIV or AIDS. Don't be scared, take your ass up to Planned Parenthood and get tested. Every Thursday free teen clinic. From 12:00pm till whenever! Please people read up on this, this real talk! You think killing in Oakland is bad!! Just imagine if you really knew the truth. So many people die of AIDS quicker than getting shot. AIDS has a higher death rate than killing in Oakland every year.

While you on your block take some time out to run up to Eastmont Mall and go to Planned Parenthood and get that exam. After that crazy sideshow and the night you spent with Jane I., Jane II. and whoever, make an appointment to get checked. 'Cause y'all don't know what's really going on. Keep it solid and keep it clean so go get checked my young ladies and fellas!

It's a big world out there
So evil and cold
Less and less people
Live to get old

The World As I See It
by Dustin, posted Jun 26, 2003

Sittin' in my cell
Staring at the wall
I've come to realize
I've got nobody at all
Not a staff or judge
Even care I exist
It drives me insane
And I'm so sick of it
It's a big world out there
So evil and cold
Less and less people
Live to get old
With so much hatred
Leading to so much fear
All anyone can think is,
"How do I get out of here?"
But there's no place to run
No place to hide
And the world won't find
peace
No matter how hard it should
try
A lot of subjects out there
Can't find a reason
To stick around and live
Until the next season
With so much pressure
With alcohol and drugs It's
not a surprise
Most of us are thugs
We can't seek help 'cause it's
against our law
So we steal, sell and use
And that's our major flaw
We're greedy for money
Girls, respect and fame
But deep down inside
We know our morals are lame
But we're too afraid to admit
it
Too afraid to say what we feel
We're scared of the
consequences
Scared to get killed It's a
tough world out there
It's evil, no doubt
But keep your head strong
And you can't be put out
Stay true to yourself
Don't forget who you are
Keep these thoughts in mind
And you're bound to get far

Movement

There is always movement in life. Movement towards particular goal, or a movement towards destruction.

What about revolutionary movement? How about the Civil Rights movement of the past? Or the prisoners movement?

Whether good or bad, life is about constant movement. Just as ones life moves from birth to death.

The movements of the past, took cooperation, strength, faith and courage. Most importantly there was a need for everyone to participate in the overall struggle.

The civil rights movements was more than marches and speeches. It was a celebration of cultural and political awareness. The fact that there was positive movement was victory in itself, by it being a positive and exciting influence on our present lives. It served to be a wake up call from the loss of hope and stagnation of procrastination! However that particular movement had it's harvest in time. The seeds used in that crop, were the appreciation of deep Black culture, Black courage and of course Black revolutionary actions.

The Black prisoners movement is always in support of the larger struggle for liberation for all colonized people throughout the world. Our struggle to survive as a culture, consciousness, human right and still be identified as individuals. However, this doesn't just apply to Black people. This also applies to everyone who is striving for the same liberation.

Even though some of us are still in prison fighting the deterioration of our spirit, soul and bodies, we must always realize that our struggle goes beyond these gates and prison walls.

I am aware of the Puerto Rican revolutionary action in Puerto Rico as well. Yes, my Liano Indian roots intertwined with my African roots. I am very proud of my people who are striving for independence. I am please to know that they are moving to get US Armed Forces out of Vieques, Puerto Rico.

I am please to know that I'm made up of these two ethnic cultural backgrounds. I am thankful that God used an African and Puerto Rican to form me.

Now lets all move together!

ABUSARA ASKARI (6.46) AbusaraAskari comes to us from Pleasant Valley State Prison in Coalinga California. The following two pieces you are about to read are his views on his life and how he sees his relations to the greater whole. by the way, this is not the first time Abusara has written us. Not too long ago Abusara was published in The Beat, and we are grateful that he continues to drop his wisdom, his life on us, even though we have not been fulfilling our end as fast as we would like.

my thoughts and memories tend to become an everlasting archive of systematic soap opera war stories on the everlasting battlefield of life.

Caught Up In The Madness

From the beginning, as far back as I can remember . . .
There's been madness, drama, and life changing circumstances. From a child all the way to a man.
When I take the time to contemplate and reminisces,
my thoughts and memories tend to become an everlasting archive
of systematic soap opera war stories
on the everlasting battlefield of life.
Every scene and episode,
only I can view.
Although some was character building,
they can only be shared with the camera man of my soul.
That's due to the fact that, he holds the lifetime library of scenes that constantly reminds me of all the madness
I survived and lived through
When this occurs,
I instantly find and retrieve the strength and courage to make it through my part in the overall struggle and madness in my everlasting life.

ERNESTO ZARAGOZA (6.41) We'd like to welcome Ernesto to the pages of The Beat Without. He writes to us from Woodland, California. The piece he shares this issue is a heavy one. We look forward to hearing more from Ernesto as well as seeing his art work in the future.

Life in Hell

Have you ever seen the sunrise from a lonesome prison cell;
Have you ever heard a freight train's whistle blow like a monster out of hell...
Have you ever seen the mailman greet a thousand other men;
While the letter you've been waitin' for failed to come again...

If you have never seen these things, then you're a lucky man;
Your life has been a good one since the day your time began.

But if you know the feelin'
of a lonesome prison cell;
your life has been a lonely one and you lived your life in hell..

The Story of my Life

The Beginning

My mother was born on Oct 9, 1953, she had me on May 16 1978 I was born in Panama City, Panama. I lived there half of my life.

I grew up with the love of my mother. I didn't have a papa, cause my papa left before my mother had me. But my mother did tell me that my papa was no good. He was always getting drunk and sleeping with other woman. He never cared about my mother. That's why he left before I was born. He didn't wanna see his boy, that was named alter him. My papa name is Alexis, so my mother named me Alex. So I grew up without a dad.

It was tough for my mommila to take care of me. My mother didn't have a good job. She was working at a bar called Noche De Amor. Where my mom was working she wasn't getting paid that much so it was hard for her to be there for me. We also lived in this place that was falling a part, so my mother took me away from that place.

She sent me to my grandma and grandpa's casa (home) to live with them for a while. I was two years old when my mother took me there. My grandpa and my grandma and me there they were good people. Well my mother left me there, and she left me for a long time, almost two years. Without seeing her. There would be days that I would cry, 'cause I would want to see her. She would call on the phone, and talk to me and I would tell her, "momma when you coming to see me?" And I would hear her cry, she said "mjo, I'm looking for a good place for us. And a good job." We would talk for a while and then bang up, and that would be the last time I hear from her! It was hard for me, 'cause I love her so much but I understood, 'cause my grandma would tell me she loves me.

Since I was living with my grandpa and grandma I had to learn, I started school when I was four years old. In those days we wore blue and white, blue plants and white T-shitts. School was really bad, 'cause if we would be bad kids, the teachers would spank us with the ruler and the other kids would laugh and that wasn't really cool.

I learned a lot of things on the weekend. When there was no school, I had to wake up in the morning and go to work with my grandpa. We would go out and cut wood with an ax. We would cut about five of them and then bring them home, not by car, not by horse, but by walking and carrying them on our shoulders. I would carry hall a tree on my shoulders, and we would walk long-long-long miles. It took about four hours to get home, we didn't live in the city, it was a rancho way out there. When we would get home, the day was not over. I had to get out there, and cut them in pieces for the firewood. So we could have a fire, so we could cook dinner.

Mostly we ate rice and beans, or chicken. We would eat that five days in a row. This went on for a year. Till my mother came back.

She came back around in 1983. I was so happy to see her, I even cried on her shoulder 'cause I was so happy to see her, and I now knew I was leaving to be with my mother. Well sure enough my dream came true. Mom found a good job, and a good place. It took her a while, but I was happy to be leaving with her. But I was sad also, 'cause I didn't want to leave my grandma and grandpa, 'cause I had a lot of love for them. Plus, alter all that learning, cutting wood, killing chickens, cuthng grass by hand, and going to the city to clean shoes to earn my money so I could buy some shoes. I learned a lot, but it was good, I was ready to leave.

Me, Mom and My New Family

Well after leaving grandma and papa casa, I went on living with my mom in the city of Panama. We were living on this street called Chorio St. It was a pretty old place, but it was better then living in that place that was falling a part. Even people would try to break in to rob us. People would sleep on the stairs. They were bums, they would even try to rape my mother when she had to go to work. But it was better that my mom found that place it was a lot more fun.

I didn't have to work anymore. Maybe sometimes, but mostly momma would get money for me. We would go to the city and have fun, ride the bus around town. Then sometimes we would stop for some ice cream. It was fun, especially on the weekends, we would go to the beach and enjoy the freedom and the tropical sun. It was fun living with my mother.

It was just me and her for while. Till my mother found a boyfriend, he was from Chorcio, Panama. He was Spanish Black he was a good man, I think. I was seven years old when I met him, but he was cool. He loved my mother, and also love me, my mother was with him for a year until she got pregnant by him. He slayed with my mother till my brother was born in 1985. My mother named him Carlos. This was sad for my mother 'cause it (not having a father) was gonna hurt my brother Carlos. oh yeah, my mother's boyfriend's name was Smithy, bad news was, that he got killed by someone, so there we go again, the second kid that grows up with out a daddy.

As my brother grew up, we became good brothers. It was fun to have someone to play with. But sometimes if he would get hurt momma would spank me, and I would get mad at Carlos. But me and Carlos we had fun. As he got bigger he was calling me papa. I would tell him no, I m Alex, till he learned well after Smith's death.

It took my mother a while to let go, till she found someone new. Apparently my mother did find someone new, but he wasn't from Panama. He was from United States. My mother found him on the beach. He was visiting Panama, since he was in the army. They based him in Panama for a while. My mother got to know him for a while, he would come and spend the night with us. I think he was only 24 years old when they got together. I was around 8 and my brother was 2 years old, my mom was still young too.

Well at the time he was a good man, I liked him. Well they were together for awhile, until he had to leave. But he wasn't leaving for good he told my mother he was coming back in a year. Well he left, but my mother and him continued talking on phone from Panama to Denver, Colorado. I didn't even know there was another country outside of Panama?

eventually my mom and him fell in love. A couple of months after he left, my mother became pregnant by him. My mom, didn't know she was gonna have baby. When she told him that she was pregnant, he flew on airplane back to Panama to stay with momma.

In 1986 momma had the baby. It was a girl, her name is Jessica. She was so pretty like a doll. Well life started to begin with momma and her new boyfriend and my new sister. Everything was starting. He stayed with us until he told my mother, that he was going back to tell his family about us, and his new baby girl. He was also going to find a place for us all, to come to America to stay with him. It took him one year to find a place for us to live with him. When he came back, he sard, "pack your stuff" I didn't know what he was saying, 'cause all I knew was Spanish words, I look at him like "what?" And then my mother told me in Spanish "bamonos (let's go) DK!"

But it took while before we left, 'cause we had to fix some papers for me, Carlos and my mother, cause he was adopting us as his sons. Our name change from Martinez to Hampton, it costed a lot of money for that.

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ALEX MARTINEZ (7.12) This next autobiographical story was submitted by a new writer to The Beat Without in Alex Martinez. Alex steps up huge with his tale of his painful life. We hope by Alex sharing his story has helped him in some way, but will help some of you who are struggling to get your stories out. We really hope Alex felt a bit more liberated after completing this part of his story. This is what writing is all about. We hope Alex will continue to share with us. His voice is very important. Alex writes us from a California Medical Facility State Prison in Vacaville, CA.

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My New Home - America

Anyways, I didn't want to leave, 'cause I had a lot of cousins. My grandma had eighteen kids and they were all my cousins, and I didn't wanna leave grandma & grandpa behind, 'cause I loved them sooooo much. It was hard for me to leave, 'cause I knew I was not gonna see them anymore. Well apparently we left with tears. I remember seeing grandma and papa crying 'cause I was leaving but mamma didn't let me stay.

Well there we are on the airplane flying away to America. I remember we were over the clouds. I was scared to be up there, 'cause I never been on an airplane, that was my first time on one of them.

I remember we stopped in Florida to pick up our next flight to Colorado. My mama s boyfriend did not tell me that Colorado was going to be cold. I was wearing some shorts and a t-shirt when we got to Colorado. There was white things coming from the sky. I really did not know what it was, 'cause we didn't have that in our country. Plus, I was so cold, I couldn't even speak. I-I-told my mom since she knows a little American words, at that time I started to call him dad, I told mom to ask him what is that coming from the sky. He said "snow!" Man, I was so cold, I couldn't even walk. I ended up going to the restroom with my package (suitcase) and taking out my clothes so I could put on warmer clothes. I remember I had about 10 t-shirts, 5 pairs of pants and 3 jackets to keep myself warm, from this cold. I even remember drinking the water and it was so nasty, 'cause I was not use to that water.

I was having fun, even my brother was having fun. I don't know about my sister because she was a young little girl.

It was so beautiful to be in America! For the first time in my life, the house we lived in was so big. I never lived in a house that was so beautiful with grass. But, I couldn't see the grass 'cause the snow, but in the summer it was so cool. Me and my brother would be playing since we didn't have friends yet. It was me and my brother playing in the snow. Even in the summer we would go out to the lake and look around at the place we lived in.

At this time I did not even start school yet, I didn't even known how to speak English yet. My brother didn't even known either.

That Girl

I was not even there for that long till I found me a girl. She lived next door to me. I remember I was like the age of 9 or 10. When she came to me and said I like you. I didn't know what she was saying –so I didn't speak one word to her. My mother was telling me in Spanish, what the girl was telling me in English, that she wants to know my name and I told her Alex. Her name was Missy. She was beautiful for her age, but since I didn't speak English it was hard for me to talk to her.

Well I end up learning how to speak English. It took a while, but I learned.

I was going to school that's name was Coronado. That was the school that Missy went to too. After being in America for a good 2 years, with broken English words, I learned how to speak to Missy. We would do homework together. Her parents were cool, my brother would also come over to play with her brother and I was falling love.

I remember I kissed her once, but I was too shy to do it again. I didn't know what a kiss felt like. But me and Missy fell in love and we were going to the same school.

I remember I use to get in trouble for backing her up 'cause the boys would push her down, and for me fighting in school. The teacher would call home. I would be scared to go home even though my step-dad didn't put hands on me, yet. But after some good spanks my step-dad got tried of me getting in trouble. So he decided to put hands on me, but in the wrong way. He started abusing us, me and my brother. He was never like that before. We finally got to see the real him.

The Abuse

ALEX MARTINEZ CONT.

He started to be abusiv to us all, there were times that I would come home from school, and I would find my mother, with black eyes, spht lip. And I would ask momma what happened, and she would say, "nothing mijo." I even found my brother beat up by this animal. (When I am talking about animal I mean my step-dad.) After beating my poor mother, he would turn around and beat me for no reason. He would get real mad 'cause I wouldn't do what he said.

There were times that he wanted me to shine his shoes and I would do it and when I was done, he would check if it was clean. He would hit me with his fist and then kick me with boots 'cause the job wasn't right. After be beat me, he would turn around and beat my mother for the job I done, he tell my mother, "your son of a b___ kids, I'm gonna kill him, 'cause he doesn't know how to do anything around here!"

There would be times I would be scared to go to school 'cause I had bruises from the way he beat me. My whole back was a big purple bruise from his hits, kicks, and slammings on the wall, all from this animal.

I would go with out sleeping at night. I couldn't go to sleep because when he got home which was pretty late and if he found my mother sleeping he d wake her up by hitting her in the face and kicking her. I would hear my poor mother screaming for her life. All I did was cry while hearing my mother get beat by him for no reason. After beating my mother he would come in my room to see if I was sleeping and if I was sleeping he would do the same thing to me.

I would go to school and fall sleep on the desk. The teacher would always get mad at me. And they would call my home and I knew that once I got home I was going to get beat again. Surely, when I got home my step-dad beat the hell out of me.

I remember one time I had to go to hospital 'cause I had brain damage because he would pick me up and throw me against the wall head first. When I got to the hospital, they found out about the bruise that I had on my back. They ask me who did it, but I was too scared to say, 'cause he told me if I say anything he will kill me and mom. So I told them I fell down the stairs. It was too hard for them (hospital officials) to believe.

They went to my bouse and tried to arrest my mother. I then said, "no! It is not her!" I said to the police, "look at my mother eye!" They told her to take her sunglasses off, so she did. After my mother told them what happened, they went looking for him, till they arrested him, but be only stayed two nights in jail.

When he got home, again, he started to beat us again for telling. I remember one night we were eating on the table, and because I was eating to much, he told me "f in get your ass on the floor and eat like a dog!" He even put my plate on the floor, and shoved my face to the plate on the floor and told me to eat it all. And if I didn't do it, I was going to get beat.

I remember one time when Jessica got a little bigger, I think Carlos was five and Jessica was four years of age. They were born one year apart, well anyway, Jessica was too small to know better and her own blood dad told her to move away from the TV. Jessica was to small to understand what he was saying, so because Jessica didn't move, he threw a fork and stabbed my little sister in her left back leg. My sister was screaming, but he didn't care. My mother screamed, "Wesley why did you do that?" He said, "I didn't mean to."

I think I was already 12 years old, when I was sitting at the table and, told him "f--- you" for what he did to my sister. He said, "what did you say?" And I said it again "f--- you b----!" He got up and beat the hell out of me. I learned those words in school from a couple lil homies that I had.

After all this beating, I got tired of being hurt by this animal. But I had to live there, 'cause I didn't have any cousins that were from Panama here.

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California - Drugs and More Trouble

Well, then we moved away from Colorado Springs to California. Because the animal was seeing that I was being a bad ass, and not only that, 'cause his family lived there also.

Things didn't change in California, it was still same. I just didn't understand why my mom loved him. I hated him. It was wrong to move to California, that's where I started to look for friends to get away from his abuse. The friend I found were the kind that did drugs. They were older teens and a 22 year old. The older people I hung out with were mostly troublemakers. To get away from him, I would go kick it with them.

I didn't know how to smoke weed, till they laught me. I remember taking the first hit to the lungs. I almost died 'cause I didn't know how to smoke.

Then I learned the streets rules. I was about 15 years old.

I would come home after being all drunk and smelling of all I did. But I didn't care, I was having my fun. Since I couldn't have a family to love me the way I wanted to be loved.

Well after always coming home late, my mother start to wonder what was going on. I didn't want to hurt my mother. But she found things in my room—like weed rolled up, condom, bottles of beer, and even phone numbers of females. I was getting a lot of females, most of them were Mexican and Whites. I knew my mother knew, that I found someone better.

I stopped kicking it with my brother and sister. It hurt me. There were days I would play with my lil' brother but that wasn't my thing anymore, I just wanted to patty that's all. I wouldn't even go to school 'cause I wanted to kick it with the homies. For a young kid like me, I went through a lot drama. I would skip school to kick with my girlfriends and homeboys.

The Change

Mama didn't catch on to everything yet till one day she found a colored rag in my pocket. The first thign she did was cry, 'cause she saw I was in the wrong places. She said "mijo (son) why!?" I said, "why what!?" And then she said "don't talk to me like that." She continued, "Why do you want to hurt me?" And then I said, "how am I hurting you by doing this!?" Tears started to come from my mother's eyes, 'cause she was in pain. But I was too into it to let go.

I was hurt also, by living with that animal that beat me and my mother and my brother. He kept putting hands on my mother. I told my mother one day "if you don't leave him, I'm leaving for good." She didn't believe me till one day I left from home, for a good period of time, almost about 5 month. I went to live with my girl, her name was Jennifer. She lived in Hayward California. She too was a gang affiliated girl.

I remember momma was looking for me. She had me reported as a runaway. I called her one time and she said, "where are you at?!" I said to her, "mommy in a better place." The last words I said to her were, "I love you," and I hung up before she said anything. It hurt, but I had- to get away from there. I finally came back but for little while.

I remember when I came back I found my little brother beat up and my mother was pregnant again so what I did was I took my brother, Carlos, away from home. I took him with me for a long time, for one year.

The whole time my mother, the police, and the animal was looking for me but I was to far to be found. My girlfriend's parents knew what was going on. So they paid a round trip for us all to go live in Arizona with other family members, so the police wouldn't find us.

Soon, I came back with my brother. I couldn't do this to mother, when came back she was mad as hell. She yelled, "where were you?" I didn't tell her. All I knew was that my brother was looking better then before. He was wearing good clothes. He was fed hella good, and I kept him in good shape. But you know what, my mother turn me in to the police.

I had to do time, just a little, only like nine months. Wow, that wasn't nada (nothing) to me.

ALEX MARTINEZ CONT.

When I hit the streets I was doing the same things as before, selling drugs, since I dropped out of school at the age of 17 yrs. I was selling weed, from ounces, but that's all. I then started to steal cars, it would take me three seconds to do one car.

The cars I would steal would be Toyotas, Nissans, Fords, and Impalas. I was stealing them for parts, 'cause my girlfriend, Jennifer's pa' was working for Auto Motor. Her dad was like a gangster himself, and I would steal the cars for parts and he would pay like $500 to $600 for whatever he took. I was getting paid pretty good.

Soon I got busted, it wasn't my first time being locked up in Juvenile Hall.

The first time I ever got busted I was a young teen, and kept going till I was 17 and a half for things like tagging on the wall, and bushing car windows. I would only do a little time. But that wasn't nada (nothing) to me. Little time.

Once I hit the streets, I was back in my little world. When I hit the age of eighteen, my mother had already 2 kids, but she was not with him anymore. So that was good.

At the time I was living on my own with Jennifer. Her parents gave us a place, me and her were together for five years straight. We broke up 'cause she found me with someone else. But I would still see her, we were good friends. And she still loves me.

But I never went to live with my mother again. I was working a good job at KFC and getting paid pretty good. It didn't bother me paying my own bills, plus, my brother was living with me. I kept my place until I was 20 years old when I lost it 'cause I was on drugs again.

Finally I went back to school and got my diploma. I was a smart kid. So I went on - on my own - doing my owo life. Most likely I would end up like my real dad. Locked up, stealing, different women, drugs and others. But that wasn't my mother's fault, that was mine, but even though I was doing what I was doing I gave my mother the money I earned on the calle (Streets). I would give her $200 dollars, and rest is mine.

Life was tough for me, since I grew up this way, with an abusive step-dad. So then, like I said, I went on with my life, doing my own things. I started to work and got back with Jennifer 'cause I loved her.

Jennifer had a good job she was going to college for computer learning, and I started to work for a warehouse, forklift driver.

I've been in jail a couple of times. For bullshhh but that's all.

I never had kids with Jennifer, she couldn't have kids, she was born that way.

Well mom never went back with him, 'cause he found someone else that treats him like shhh, but who care. I remember he came back one time, and he put hands on my mom. And I put hands on him and also burned his car down, for being a fool. I even had a couple of homeboys that fired up on him. I didn't care if he was dead or what. But life went on, it got better, till Jennifer past away at the age of 21. She died of a head on car wreck. I cried my ass off for years, till I got over it. Then her mother died of the pain, and then her dad too. The only living member of her immediate family living is her brother, Malito, he still kicks it with us. He is around the age of 17 years, he now lives with is Uncle, but that's my boy.

So I've moved on without Jennifer, it's just me and my mom once again, all alone with my brothers and sisters. My mom been single for eight years already, and life has been better since all we been through together.

Everyone has grown up. My brother Carlos is 17, Jessica 16, Sharon 13, Jonathan 12 and I am 23 now, going on 24.

Overall, life has been better than before, till I ended up in this place, prison.

Survival

I haven't gone one day without acknowledging the fact that I'm just another poor man with a rich man's dreams. A black man still struggling from the depth of his ghetto where children go to sleep on empty stomachs and mothers and fathers main concern is getting high. Instead of spending their last five dollars on food, they'd rather give it to the man of poison "the dopeman." Leaving children no other alternative but to get out there at a early age and fight blindly against this world of survival.

I often fantasize on the day when I can just live in peace. The day when I can get off my tired knees and stump with pride, but I know one must crawl to walk and walk to succeed. For I know that which I can conceive I can achieve.

It's this thing called survival running around snatching up souls like a deadly disease. You either search for a cure or die from its sickness. It's known to respect those of success and look down on those of failure. Silently laughing in your face for being a child of poverty. Survival is like the war. You either win or die trying, giving up is unacceptable. We are guaranteed one thing at birth and that's death, knowing this, I'd rather die with my eyes open staring success in the face, instead of with my eyes closed where success is only a dream.

E MONEY (5.12) We are honored to share with you the following by our long time friend and teacher, E-Money. E, was with us from the beginning, and has continued to show love with his words and wisdom. Currently E, a San Franciscan, and former YGC resident, is now serving time at Pleasant Valley State Prison in Coalinga, CA. As you will soon find out, he continues to take his life very seriously as he prepares for the day he returns to the free world.

It's scary to see how quickly we will sell our souls for these worthless material wishes. We fail to realize that "being" is more important than "having." We came in this world naked and we will leave as came. So living a life collecting materials is living a life of blindness. Earth materials are like casino coins, they're only useful while you are here. It's something we can't take with us.

To the youth, living a simple, uncomplicated, uncluttered life requires work. We must first stop, think and see where we as a generation stand, in which ways we can better our lives and make this earth a better place for the unborn. Remember, it's not all about us, but also those who still haven't had a chance to live. We must stay striving in this world of survival for who will if we don't?

To the youth, living a simple, uncomplicated, uncluttered life requires work.

JOHNNY LOZOYA (5.48) The following piece you are about to read was written for The Beat by Johnny Lozoya. Besides being an amazing artist, Johnny also has a knack with words. Johnny has shown tremendous loyalty this past year, we look forward to hearing from him soon. He also collaborated on The Beat's 2001 calendar. Hope you received your 2001 calendar. He writes us from Pelican Bay State Prison.

Consequences

To all you youngsters out there, if you really want to improve your life, you can start working on the one thing you have control of, and that's yourself. You can focus on being a good friend, a source of unconditional love and support. We can be happy and accept those things that at the present, we can't control.

While we focus our efforts on things we can, we need to also consider two things that merit deeper thought, they are consequences and mistakes.

While we are free to choose our actions, we are not free to choose the consequences of those actions. Consequences are governed by natural law. We can only hope that the consequences are good. Undoubtedly, there have been times in our lives when we have picked up what we later felt was the wrong stick. Our choices have brought consequences we would rather have lived without. I know if you had the choice to do things over again, you would make it different. The fact is, we can't change what has already transpired. We can only learn to acknowledge the mistakes we made and correct them so we won't repeat them again.

It is not what others do, or even our mistakes that hurt us the most, it is our response to those mistakes, chasing after the poisonous snake that bites us will only drive the poison through our entire system. It is far better to take measures immediately to remove the poison. Like they say, our response to any mistake affects the quality of the next moment.

OMAR ABEDELAL (5.12) Also known as Lil' Cisco writes to us from the CYA in Ione, CA. We lost contact for a while and are happy to have his pieces once again in BWO. Omar tells the truth about the key to knowledge in his piece, "My Knowledge to YOU, and in his poem, "The Real Deal" he raise some very important questions.

My Knowledge to YOU

I'm writing to YOU, the young adults of the Bay Area. My name is Omar "Lil' Cisco" Abedelal, and I'm locked down in the CYA. The only good thing is I'll be out finally in about nine months. At this point I just wanna throw out some knowledge to all who think you know it all. You feel me?

I have lots of knowledge, I'm sure a lot of you do as well. So share my knowledge as well as your own.

If you believe in charity then perform charitable acts.

If you believe in equal rights, let me see you address these rights to everyone else.

If you believe in loving your family, start showing people how you manifest that love.

Stop getting locked up and go on the straight path. Can't nobody fool me. So, "If you want to fool someone, try. But some, such as myself, are wise enough not to let ourselves be fooled. If you are foolish enough to try and fool yourself, you may also be foolish enough to let yourself be fooled".

Turn y'all lives around. It ain't too late. I'm a leave you with this. The truth will set you free. Tell me I'm lying. Excuses are like butt holes, everyone's got one.

When you don't wanna accept responsibility for your wrong doings, any lame excuse will do. Right? It doesn't have to be cool. In fact, it might be stupid, but if you need it, it will do. Tell the truth my homies. That's real. Much love.

Billy's First Bike

When I was a young boy growing up, my childhood was filled with many nights listening to the adults in my family argue. And, man, did they ever argue. I mean they argued about everything, from clothes, drugs, relationships, to sometimes arguing about always arguing... and there was no telling when these verbal disagreements would end, or where they would lead.

Sometimes, they weren't even in the same room as they argued. Instead, they would just yell at each other through the walls. Other times, they would suddenly break out into laughter over something stupid one of them said, or how silly they looked when they said it.

But there were times when the fighting was so filled with rage, the whole neighborhood would echo with my family's problems. On these occasions, only the arrival of the police could bring my family back together as we united to prevent the police from dragging someone off to jail.

But out of all the things my family seemed to fight about, there was one argument they had more than any other. It seemed every couple of months my ears would ring with voices yelling about how there was no money for rent. It got so that as soon as I heard this particular fight, I knew I would be soon saying good-bye to my recently made friends, helping to once again pack up my family's little belongings into whatever mode of transportation we had at that moment. For a while, I started to believe my family only stayed in a place until the new paint smell vanished.

Looking back over my childhood, it's now so easy to see how the long trail of houses, apartments, and even motel rooms my family left behind, shaped who I am today. For the unstable nomadic lifestyle my family led caused me to feel like a perpetual new student. I was always finding myself standing at the front of a classroom while a teacher announced, "We have a new student, class. His name is Israel." And, to this day, I don't believe I ever stayed in one school long enough to complete a full school year. To tell you the truth, I'm surprised any of the lessons stuck in my head with all the school changing I did.

Though I grew to hate the constant uprooting my family did throughout my childhood, there was one time when I couldn't wait for the explosion of voices to rock the house we were living in. It came only two months after moving into a quaint little house in a somewhat sleepy middle class neighborhood. I recall this particular move quite well, because it came with much secrecy surrounding it.

I remember my whole family gathering in the living room of the apartment we had two days to vacate. And, as if planning some major heist, I listened as the adults warned that only two female family members would be seen by the owner of the house we planned to rent. Everyone else would stay out of sight until it was time to move in. We would have to content ourselves with excited descriptions of what color the house was, how big the kitchen, bedrooms and backyard were.

On the day of the move, I knew my family was entering a world I never knew before. I quickly became aware of this when a couple neighborhood boys — sitting on their bikes a few feet away — unceremoniously called to me in the way only young kids do. With scrunched up faces, they asked why my family was using a car to move our belongings. Up until that moment, I was never made aware this was unusual, but seeing the looks on their faces told me it was, which instantly caused me to feel an intensely deep shame.

One of the curious boys who came that day to observe my family's moving in was an eleven-year-old boy named Seth. He was the same age as me, and lived in the white house with green trimming directly across from our rented one. Over the next couple of weeks, me and Seth got to know each other very well. But honestly, I really had no interest in becoming his best friend — that is until the day I was invited into his room.

On that day I discovered just how unfair life truly can be, how good some kids could have it. You should have seen this room. It was filled with countless toys and gadgets. He had so many toys, somebody had built shelves along the walls to hold some of them. And these shelves were lined with action figures of all shapes, colors and sizes. Every toy I had seen on TV and desperately longed for, my friend Seth had. He had every GI Joe action figure that was ever made, along with accessories. Even the air over his bed was taken up with toys, for suspended from the ceiling were numerous airplane models, which looked to be from different wars in aircraft history. Boy, did that kid have toys!

However, what shocked me most, and cut me to the quick, was the way he treated his toys. He would toss them to the side as if they were nothing, or even more blasphemous in my eyes, acted as if some of them didn't exist. But I learned otherwise when I asked if I could borrow some of his least desired toys. To this, he outright refused, saying I would have to come to his house if I wished to play with them.

But out of all the things Seth possessed, there was one thing I desired more than any other. It was the brand new dirt bike he pedaled up and down our street each day after school. Ofcourse, there were other boys in the neighborhood who owned bikes, but none of them was like Seth's. For Seth had a GT Performer. It was the most expensive out of everyone's bikes, and, boy, did it look it, with its shiny chrome frame, racing seat, blue alloy rims and pedals.

It just begged to be ridden, and God how I wanted to. But Seth would have none of that. In fact, he refused to let anyone ride it, no matter what the price offered. And because I was the only boy without a bike, the closest I got to enjoying it was setting up ramps for Seth to jump.

And that's how things were for the first couple of months. I stood around while the other boys rode about trying to perform various tricks. Or, I would sit on the curb and listen to them talk about bicycle parts. These conversations I no longer took part in, not after they had all laughed at me once, pointing out the fact I didn't even have a bike, so what did I know!

But that all changed one night. One night when the air in my house was thick with smoke, and not all of it from tobacco mind you, the sound of voices and laughter touched every corner of the house as the adults of my family and their friends partied. These parties took place two to three times a week, and funny enough, my family never seemed

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ISRAEL PEREZ (10.08) It's been a while since we've heard from our long-time friend, Israel Perez. With this extended childhood memory, he's back with a bang! We have no trouble discerning the real crimes that are committed in this bittersweet tale. It is not the theft of the bicycle that he recalls in such brilliant detail, but the theft of childhood itself, and the failure of a family and a society to prepare a boy for a future. We know Israel to be one of the most creative and talented writers it has ever been our pleasure to feature in The Beat — and we know he is capable of any achievement, from classroom teacher to Supreme Court Justice. That nobody cared to provide the minimum foundation for such accomplishments is the real crime — a crime which is repeated endlessly in a society that cares more for profits than for people. Instead of handing down great decisions from the High Court, Israel writes his memories from the SHU at Corcoran State Prison... But let us not preach. There is no preaching in this reminiscence of a child without a childhood, just a deep understanding that gives painful meaning to the too-easily tossed-off phrase, "Life isn't fair!"

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to connect the constant partying with the constant moving we did.

It was under these circumstances that I slipped out the front door to smoke the half-inch remnants of a joint I'd snuck out of an ashtray, and to sip the ice-cold beer that was uncomfortably hidden in my underwear. This was a ritual I'd taken up many parties ago, where I would sit on the trunk of our car sneaking a buzz from either alcohol or marijuana or, like that particular night, both. And though I enjoyed the mellow feeling that always took me, I also loved the way the ritual made me feel so much more sophisticated than other kids my age.

Looking around to make sure I was completely alone, something gleaming under the street's lamplight caught my eye. Setting the sweating can of beer down on the trunk, I peered between the two cars parked in Seth's driveway. There, I couldn't believe what my eyes were telling me — that the GT Performer lay exactly where Seth had slammed it down, slammed it down in a fuming rage earlier in the evening when his mother demanded he come in for dinner. It wasn't the first time he had thrown his bike down in an angry fit. However, it was the first time he forgot to retrieve it.

Stepping into the street, I was reminded of the fresh layer of gravel the city workers had laid down the day before. It crunched beneath my sneakers, making me fear the whole neighborhood would wake. And it was this fear that told me what I was going to do. Of course, in my mind I tried to convince myself I was only going to play a prank. But by the way I silently stood by the bike, seeing if that alone would cause somebody to come out, I knew I wasn't playing.

With a sensation of being outside my body, I found myself wailing the GT Performer across the street. It felt as if I was moving under water, stuck forever red-handed beneath the streetlight. I couldn't understand why a voice didn't cry out in alarm from behind me, why firm hands hadn't grabbed hold of me. After all, the chrome on the bike seemed to shine brighter than ever.

Finally, with the GT Performer leaning against the side of my house, I remembered to breathe. My ears turned to pick up the slightest sound, while the claim, "I was just playing a joke," was on my lips ready to burst forth. But after several moments passed, I felt it safe, and walked the bike to my bedroom window.

The next day found Seth accompanied by his mother going around house to house asking if anyone had seen his bike, or knew of its whereabouts. And when they finally arrived at my front door, I was utterly surprised to see all the arrogance completely gone from Seth's face. My shock alone must have convinced them my claims of ignorance were true, because as they went away down the walkway, I couldn't help hearing his mother scolding him for his spoiled carelessness.

For the first couple of nights following my crime, I could barely find sleep. At odd hours I would jump up, open my room's sliding closet doors, and just stare at the GT Performer. It was as if I needed visual proof I possessed the bike. Several hours would pass, and I'd stop believing.

This became a nightly habit, where every evening I would take out the GT Performer. Turning the bike upside down so that it rested on its racing seat and handlebars, I would crank the pedals as fast as I could, watching the wheels spin. I never once got bored with cleaning the bike. I would rub and buff every inch of it until it sparkled under my bedroom light. And whenever I became sad, I retreated to my room and the bike. Whenever the house vibrated with intoxicated parties, or with voices screaming hateful things, the GT Performer became like a crutch, getting me through the roller coaster of rough times my family was expert at creating.

ISRAEL PEREZ CONT.

The day I began to believe I might truly own the bike came when our electricity got shut off. It triggered an argument which was so heated it brought the police's authoritative knock in record time. Or maybe it was just that the neighbors were less understanding, and quicker to pick up a phone. Whatever it was, when all the dust finally settled, and all the tears had been shed and dried, my family agreed to split up with my mother settling on a motel room.

I tried to be as sullen and dejected as everyone else who moped around, but with each carload of my mother's and siblings' belongings that I helped to relay to the motel that was maybe three miles away, I couldn't help feeling giddy with excitement. I had no desire to say good-bye to the friends I made during my short stay. And I felt even less concern about whether I'd have to return to the same school come morning. All that worried me was the lack of room in the last carload we had packed just as night fell.

So, with as much confidence as I could muster, I told my mom I would ride my bike to the motel room, since there was little space and I already knew the way. She, not even wondering about what bike I was talking about, just nodded in agreement, never stopping to realize she never bought me a bicycle. And my family, being as they are, not for one second thought it strange that I cautiously walked the GT Performer down the street with a blanket covering it.

Once I believed it safe enough, I flung the blanket to the ground and took off on the bike. With all my might, I pumped my legs, propelling myself down the sidewalk at a breakneck speed. The wind began whipping at my shirt as my hair blew back away from my perspiring forehead. I must have appeared like a mentally disturbed boy to others as I reached the main street. I discovered myself laughing uncontrollably as I navigated toward the motel, jumping every curb I came across with a joyous yell. All the while, my inner voice kept screaming, "I truly got a bike. I finally have my own bike, and it's a good bike!"

At that moment, the world and my future seemed so much brighter. It seemed like anything was now possible, and I never knew such happiness. And if anyone had tried to point out that the bike was illegally obtained and I was the thief, I wouldn't have cared. Because I earned that bike. I earned it fair and square in my mind. I'd been deprived of a normal childhood along with all the childhood things that go with it. So this one thing was mine, and I deserved it!

Arriving at the motel, I practically rode the GT Performer directly into the room. I didn't bother getting off it, but just sat there as my mom and siblings unpacked. It didn't matter to me one bit that our future was so foggy. The uncertain fear that usually churned in my gut when placed in such situations was non-existent.

When my mother turned to look at me, face full of annoyance, she ordered my to put "my bike" somewhere out of the way, and help out. And I did just that. I walked the GT Performer to the farthest wall and propped it up against it, then, strangely out of character, I asked my mother how I could help.

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WILLIAM GRAJEDA CONT.

torture of the beast within that feeds off your silent weaknesses

You haven't been thrown in a dorm where in the middle of the night with thirty or forty other lil' G's who will be running around with battery packs and fileros hitting and moving at you because you are from another gang, click, or because you're Brown and they're Black. You haven't felt the block gun or rubber bullets knock you unconscious or take out your eye yet in a prison yard of one hundred or two hundred prisoners in a gang or race riot yet. You haven't been suffocated by the tear gas and fogger yet, as you try to put a t-shirt over your face and save your last breath before you start choking and feel like you're going to die or something. You haven't felt the goon squad or the extraction team come rushing you with their block guns, night sticks, and shields to beat you down and keep beating you down when you're in handcuffs. You haven't felt the pain or the profound silence of doing time in isolation and the holes yet, lil' G. You haven't felt the CYA rage of gang and race fights and melees in the dorms of Preston, Nelles, OH Close, or Paso Robles... you haven't felt the gang riots in YTS and Chad yet lil' G.

And if you think it stops there — well you're wrong lil' G — that's just the beginning, because you haven't walked through the fires of a prison war yet where real bullets are shooting prisoners down as they are trying to kill each other over gang or racial politics. You haven't been walking the trade line alone by yourself when five or six other bangers from another click try to creep up on you and try to take your life out. You haven't been in the prison hole yet where if you step out of line then your homeboys will have to check you with a cold hit to get your head back in the deadly game.

Let me tell you lil' G — this is just a brief glimpse of what the CYA and Prison world looks like for you hard bangers and gangsters who think you're tough because you're getting your grind on, you dress fly, you have a few G's in the pocket with your crew in the cuts and the nine on the side. Yeah I know you well lil' G, because that was me many years ago in another ignorant gangster time.

While you're sitting in your lil' Juvenile cage with your tough heart waiting to prove itself in front of other street kids lil' g and you're reading this game from someone who used to be just like you. Why don't you pause for a moment and think about who's more important in your life lil' G? The gang or your family?

While you are kicking back in your lil' cage waiting to hit the streets again lil' G why don't you step back for a moment and peep the real game that's being played in the fast G's and blue ice game. Don't you see everyone's in prison CYA, dead, using drugs, and can't even read or write? See lil' G- the thing about fast G's and blue ice, is that you can't spend it in prison or take it to the grave with you and cross into the next world. The thing about bling-blinging and a stack of G's- is that they can't love you! They can't buy you love! They can't hold you, they can't tell you they care. Because blue ice and fast G's don't care one way or another about you — they don't care if you live or die. A few G's and some blue ice can't buy you real friends and real love. Real homeboys and family will accept you and love you rich or poor — it doesn't matter. You can take love to the next world lil' G- but you can't take those bloodstained G's or blue ice with you to the grave.

Now give me a minute lil' G' before you put your hands over your ears and say to yourself who is this G — he don't know me! He don't know my crew! (Yeah, that's what I would say when I was in Juvenile Hall lil' G too.)

Well let me tell you lil' G, I'm the G who was slanging, banging, and stepping on the grind since he was nine ten and eleven. I'm the lil' G who knew Juvenile Hall like the back of his hand by age twelve and thirteen. I'm the lil' G who learned from his loved ones and moms or pops how to survive in the fast streets of slanging and banging. I'm the lil' G who stopped going to school in the sixth grade, but I was already tired of it in the fifth grade. I'm the lil' G who made the mistake of choosing the gang life over his own life, over a life with real loved ones, who chose the gangster life of CYA and prison instead of a real life with true family and love. Yeah, I didn't understand what it was that I was choosing at the time lil' G because I was blinded by the feeling of a few fast G's, my gangbanging and my nine on the side. Like you lil' G, I couldn't see past the broken home or the streets that I grew up in. I never stopped lil' G to see that there were some ghetto kids who went to school and they went to their local community centers to learn and meet real people who can give you help with your growth. I didn't stop to think about joining the after school programs that are free for street kids like us. I didn't see none of that lil' G and before I saw it all — I had lost my life to CYA and prison — I had blindly chosen the gangster over myself. I had chosen slanging and banging over the love and realness of family and loved ones.

You have a choice lil' G, you don't have to be in Juvenile Hall, you can get out of the ghetto, the barrio, or the broken home lil' g without the gangs or the drugs. You can make it lil' G if you really want to! You can go to school and you can graduate, you can help your local community center improve the ghetto environment so your lil' bros and lil' sisters will have a better chance to make it. You lil' G's have all the power to change your world if you want to. No matter how hard it seems or ghetto it is, you always have the power to change the way you want to play the game and end up in life. It's never too late to change your life lil' G — it's never too late.

Let me tell you lil' G, I have been through the gang riots and race riots of Preston, Nelles, YTS, and Chad. Growing up thirteen, fourteen, fifteen, sixteen seventeen and eighteen etc. I have been through the fires of a prison's rage and I sit in isolation now in Pelican Bay SHU, and I'm telling you lil' G's it's never too late to change. It's never too late to choose your life, yourself, your love, your family over the fake prison life of wannabe gangsters, gangs, fast G's, blue ice, and your nine — which will bring you nothing but pain, bloodshed violence, death, emptiness, and a grave where only you will be buried inside alone.

Epilogue:

I just thought that I'd put you up on that part of the game — the OG's don't talk about when you are growing up in the barrio, the 'hood, the streets, the fast life lil' G.

Let me tell you lil' bato, lil' G — it's easy to be a thug, a gangster, or a street baller hoodlum, it's easy to come to CYA and prison and get some tattoos — but it takes a real man, a real gangster to stop the gang banging and help your community. It takes a real street soldier to go to school and graduate to show yourself, to show your loved ones that you can make it in the ghetto without the slanging and the banging.

It is easier to live recklessly then to live responsibly, and if you know that lil' G then you should know it takes a real gangster to survive the hard times and do the right thing and live responsibly rather than taking the wannabe wanksta way out by hurting another person for a few ends or selling dope to you own fellow people just for a little piece of blue ice and the latest fashions you see on TV or in the street.

Let me tell you lil' G — you still have a chance to change your life and do the right, the real thing for yourself and your loved ones. But let me tell you lil' G if you still think you are the hardest gangster banging or thug in your streets and inside your lil' Juvenile Hall cell — then once you come to CYA and prison lil' G, you won't have to worry or think about how tough you are anymore because there will be plenty of battery packs, razor blades, iron metal pieces, and clicks of deadly gangs waiting to welcome you into the life of hate, bloodshed, gang and political and racial indoctrination, and not a few body bags for those who wannabe gangsters, thugs, soldiers and wankstas.

It doesn't matter who you think you are in here — we all have a prison number and we will always be considered all the same in the eyes of the real world — in the eyes of real society.

So be a real gangster lil' G and do the right thing for yourself, your loved ones, your family — make the right decision to choose your life and family before some wannabe street prison gang.

Do the right thing lil' G and don't end up like me sitting in the darkness alone, lost in a prison's cage because I chose without thinking when I was your age!

Respectfully...

WILLIAM GRAJEDA CONT.

be feeling some beatings that will last you a lifetime lil' G.

Once you enter into CYA lil' G you will be thrown into gang riots with battery packs, locks, and metal pieces that will crack your head and bruise your bones. Your enemies will creep up on you while you sleep in the dorm and bring a metal lock or sock of soaps crashing down on your face and if you're lucky you'll have some homeboys around to help you if they can, but if you happen to be alone then all the praying in the world ain't going to help you lil' G. You just got to struggle the best way you know how against seven or eight other enemy G's who are swinging their packs at you.

Once you enter CYA lil' gangster banging, your own homeboys are going to put you to the test, they are going to tell you to hit another lil' G, and if you don't, then your own homeboys are going to put the hit on you and drop you leva. Let me tell you lil' G, you think you hard on the streets, you think you the tough gangster right now, because you talk hard and make a few G's and wear some blue ice and carry your nine strapped. Well, that don't mean nothing once you pay the price for all that gangster style, once you lose your life to the system and you are caught in a cut-throat struggle to survive in the world of CYA and prison system gangs.

Let me tell you lil' G, once you get to CYA the moment you step off that bus and say your banging, get ready to fight right then and there. Get ready to face ten or fifteen other bangers who isn't apart of your click, who are waiting to show you that it isn't no longer a bling-bling, to nine millimeter game... when you step off that bus and enter into the world of CYA lil' G, you won't have no nine to help you now, you won't have no bling-bling to flash and all that gangster talk don't scare no one when you're looking at ten or twenty other G's by yourself or with a few homeboys on your own, waiting to kick your head around the dorm in a riot to welcome you into the gangbanging life of CYA.

Let me tell you lil' G, what the bling-bling gangsters and wannabe nine mili thugs that grind on your block or ride through your 'hood don't tell you about what the real world of CYA and Prison gang life is all about. While they are getting high, slanging, and banging talking about how they did this or did that when they did their couple months in CYA or Prison, they don't tell you lil' G how scared they were when they stepped off that bus, or ten or fifteen other bangers from another click rushed him the second they could get to him. They don't tell you lil' G, how your homeboys, your own comrades will whack you if you don't do what they say. They don't tell you lil' G, when you first drive up you got to hit someone, another banging enemy to prove yourself and if you don't do it then your own homeboys will hit you. Now what kind of homeboys is that lil' G? If you don't do what they say, then they put hands on you!? Is that a real homeboy? Is that what you call real friends???

Think about it lil' G, what kind of homeboys would hit you or have you hit someone because that's what they want? Because that's gang rules? What kind of friends who stop you from going home to see your mom, dad, bros, sis, an other familia? Who really loves you lil' G? Homeboys that will stop you from going home or seeing your family because they want you to do something for them, or your family who loves you unconditionally and wants you home to spend holidays with them?

Whose more important lil' G? Whose more real? Are your gang banging homies visiting you while you're doing time? Or is it your family who write you letters and gives you money and tell you they love you? Think about it lil' G... who really cares about you? Who really loves you? What's more important to you, having bling-bling, a nine, a few g's, and a bunch of wanna be thugs who hang around you because they want a piece of your grind? Or your family, your loved ones who love you with or without all that fake blue ice and dirty paper?

In the gang banging world of fast G's you can't have your homies and your family at the same time! It doesn't work like that lil' G. The game isn't played like that in the streets, CYA, or Prison. You are either down with the gang and you're going to lay down your life for a bunch of wanna be gangsters who are not even blood, or even take out your own brother for your gang, or you are going to be down with the real people who love you, that's your family, your blood, your sangre.

What are you going to do lil' G if your gang tells you that you have to take out your own loved one or brother because he didn't follow the gang rules? Are you going to choose your homeboys, your gang over your own flesh and blood? Over your own family? Why would you even want to belong to a wannabe click like that for lil' G? What kind of homeboys would have you hurt your own family, your own blood? Think about it lil' G - who's real? Your blood, your family, or some wannabe thugs who just want something from you?

Let me tell you lil' G - right now you still have a chance to change your life around, you still have a chance to make it in the world if you work hard at it and go to school and get involved in your local community center activities where you can learn about new things in life and meet real friends who don't want to use you to serve the purposes of the gang life. Let me tell you lil' G, you still have a chance to shine at your graduation day when you get your diploma, or when it comes time to dance at the prom with your girlfriend.

Let me tell you lil' G, no matter how bad it looks on your block or how poor you are in your home, you still can make it to the other side of the road without slangin' dope to other people who are sick inside, to someone else's mother, daughter, or child. You can make it without being a part of some crew who wants your G's. You can make it lil' G without all that, by going to school and showing how strong you really are without a bunch of wannabe thugs around.

While you sit in your Juvenile cage lil' G with a few more chances to make it out of that gang life — you still have a choice to choose between your homeboys and your family — you still have a choice to choose who you love. You can love your gang friends or you can love your family. You can't do both, because you either follow the gang rules or you choose your family who's not accepted by the gang.

Let me tell you lil' G- once you choose the gang over your family and you come to CYA and Prison- then your life is no longer yours — your life belongs to the gang now and the gang will gamble with your life every day like it ain't worth nothing, because your life in the gang ain't worth nothing! They don't care if you're going home in six months or ten years — if they tell you to hit someone then you will do it. They don't care if your family misses you and they are hurting because you are locked up. No! The gang will tell you to catch more time by hitting another gang rival from another click — and you'll be on the phone making that collect call to your family, telling moms or some loved one that you won't be getting out any time soon and you're sorry and could you please send me some photos, a letter, and a little canteen money... please?

Let me tell you lil' G, once you choose the G's, the ice, the nine and your boys over your own family, over yourself and your loved ones, then you have chosen to give your life to a world of pain, bloodshed, loneliness and dark caged time in CYA and prison holes. You think you're cool, you're down, you talk about how you do this or that with your crew, you talk about how tough you are and you flash your little blue ice, few G's, and nine while you got your clip on the side. But remember lil' G the time will come to pay the cost of your life in a prison cell or in a coffin six feet deep. And in the end you'll be crying for that real love from your family that you exchanged for the false love of a few G's and a bunch of wannabe gangsters.

Let me tell you lil' G- once you come to CYA and Prison you ain't talking about how you're going to play the game, it doesn't work that way lil' G, you're not in the streets or in Juvenile Hall no more young thug, no! When you enter this world the game will tell you how you are going to play it and if you don't like it — tough luck!

Let me tell you lil' G, you think you are tough now, you think all that gangster talk and hard looks is what's keeping you alive in the game — well you haven't seen the part of the game yet that's waiting to cut your throat in a gang riot or crack your skull open in a prison gang or race war. You haven't seen other lil' G's hang themselves or cut their wrists and lie in their own blood as their life shipped away because they wanted to escape the pain and

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WILLIAM GRAJEDA CONT.

catch more than your share of ass kickings and black eyes. I don't care how bad you are, you ain't met the tough lil' G yet whose got three to six years of YA time under his belt when you drive up and he puts the test on you, just to beat you up and see if you will fight back. Something you better do too, or you will be getting beat up everyday, like many who got hit so hard they were scared to fight back again. Yeah, but that won't happen to you right! You're a street G, you haven't felt that lock crack your head yet lil' G, or that battery pack come down on your head while you were sleeping, or that razor blade cut across your neck while you were caught in a dorm gang riot with thirty to fifty other lil' G's who are all trying to hit and move, trying not to be the one who gets caught in a corner getting battery packed by three or four enemies! So just hold on to that thought for a moment young juvenile, before you start thinking, you think you know what you're going to do in CYA before you get there, because the OG CYA crew says what's going down on the block and you're just the new kid next in line on the "waiting list," waiting to be tested.

See, right now lil' G, you're probably the tough kid in your unit, right, you and a couple of your young G's, right — yeah okay, you're tough around your lil' Juvenile unit, where everybody is about the same age and size as you — but once you come to CYA you ain't going to have that protection like you got right now in your juvenile unit when you come to CYA. They don't care how old, young, small, strong, tough, weak, or big you are, you'll be thrown into a dorm with young G's from age thirteen to eighteen and your enemies don't care how old, little, or big you are, they will come and put the rush down. And once you graduate to the bigger CYA's like Chad and YTS, then you'll be thrown in a jungle with eighteen to twenty-five year old G's, gang thugs, who all are trying to be tough with years of time under their belt and more fights, mind games, and riots than you can count.

But hey, lets not jump too far into the future here. I'm talking about once you graduate from your lil' Juvenile cage and get ready to move onto CYA with that tough street juvenile attitude you walk with, and that crazy look you try to front with in front of the other juvenile thugs, lil' G's, and cholitos... what's really happening in the game.

Let me tell you young G, that while you sit in your juvenile cage you probably still have a few more chances to hit the streets before you finally make your way to CYA. So before you go ahead and make that decision to put your nine back in the game as you step on another young G's grind, let me hit you with a few real thoughts about the real street, CYA, and prison game you're going to let your life be gambled and played in.

Like you lil G, I sat in that Juvenile Hall cage many years ago staring at the same scared, gang marked walls, exchanging tales from the 'hood and grinding in the streets with another juvenile cellmate, homeboy — talking about how we were about this and how we were about that on our block... talking about how we gonna hit the streets harder next time around and push the grind bigger than the last 'hood boss... Yeah, I talked about how I was going to do the damn thing and let me tell you lil' G, I was doing the damn thing on the block, flipping zips and birds with the homeboys and loved ones, while stacking my G's at the age of twelve, thirteen and fourteen. I had my nine in the game and I seen new cats everyday trying to step on the grind and five-o trying to hit the corners and jump fences to get a lil' G caught up again.

Like you lil' G, I thought I was the toughest lil' G on the block with my nine, my grind, my bling, the homeboys in the barrio, 'hood, click. Nobody could touch us. I used to think, we were untouchable like Al Capone and Bugsy Segal.... I never did stop to think that Al Capone died in prison, and Bugsy Segal was laid down by his own boys... No, I just believed that the homeboys and I were untouchable because I had my nine in the game and my clip on the grind and with a few G's in the pocket, "what could go wrong?" All I had to do was keep my mind focused and one eye on the enemy and the other eye on five-o creeping. I never did stop to think that the longer you kept looking three ways at on time, step on the grind, and reload on the nine, you would start seeing everything through a three way window and not realize that you were living inside a glass house.

Like you lil' G, I challenged the streets, I didn't care who was who or who was about this or that. I had loved ones in the game that were OG's, fresh out the pen and putting me up on game, on the soldier grind, and I thought with that schooling under my belt, nobody could mess with me. I didn't stop to think that this OG was just a dope fiend who got out of prison for being on the grind. I didn't stop to think about it when I seen the five-o snatch him back off the streets a week later, back in the pen for pushing the grind. No, I didn't see that. All I saw, all I was hearing was the OG game he was putting me up on and how I felt even tougher, more untouchable after he hit me with some game. I never stopped to think, to see that his game was about rolling the dice in a prison yard, and with every roll you made the fate of your life was being tossed in a deadly gamble.

Like you lil' G, I had loved ones who have been to CYA, County Jail, and the Pen, and they told me it wasn't nothing, it wasn't about nada. They put me up on the "real" game and I felt like I could take on CYA, County Jail, and Prison on all at once and survive. I knew this because the OG loved ones put me up on game. So somehow I was left with the feeling that I had already taken over CYA, County Jail, and Prison, and I hadn't even been there yet. That's how tough I thought I was lil' G, lil' bato loco, and I acted even tougher on the streets lil' G with my nine, my grind, and my fast G's in the crazy game. I had a death wish.

That's right, lil' G, I felt untouchable. I felt invincible just like you think you are feeling even while you sit in your Juvenile cage, waiting to hit the streets and get back on the grind again.

That's right lil' G, just like you, I dropped out of school in the sixth grade, but I was already tired of it in the fifth grade. Like you lil' cholo, I learned how to pop my first steering wheel column at the age of twelve from one of the OG loved ones. Like you lil' G, I knew what the leather belt buckle felt like from behind, like you lil' G, I knew what it felt like not to feel loved enough, or to see his moms and pops strung out on drugs, spending the welfare checks on getting high. Like you lil' G, I knew what it was like to have no one around when mom and pops was in jail, or to have only one parent around because the other one left. Like you lil' G, I learned how to hide the tears when I was nine or ten. Like you lil' G, I learned how to hide the pain that cried inside the heart when I was nine, ten. Like you lil' bato, I haven't felt a tear stain on my cheek since the first time in Juvenile Hall at the age of nine. Like you lil' G, every time you feel that pain I know you hurry up and hide it inside a defiant show of anger and rage. Trying your best to put on that tough street juvenile look and starting a fight with the first juvenile who looks at you too hard or too long. And if you're on the streets then you'll grip your nine and get crazy banging because you are trying desperately to run from that pain, that hopelessness, that weakness, you are feeling inside... yeah, I know you well lil' G, I know you very well.

Now let me put you up on some real game lil' G, about what the future is going to really look like as you keep stepping on the grind, testing the nine, and flashing that bling-bling in the streets barrio, 'hood... what the game is going to look like as you keep tossing the dice on the hard streets and gambling with every new roll, the fate of your juvenile life between prison and death.

Once you have finally graduated from Camps, Group Homes, and Juvenile Halls, you will now enter into a cut-throat world that you have never seen before in your life (and I'm not talking about no ninety day observation in NRCC or SVCE either). Oh and if your only fourteen, fifteen or sixteen, then you better start praying now because you are going to really be thrown into the fires of a dark hell where your quiet screams won't help you and your lil' gangster looks and hard talk ain't about nothing until you have survived nine or ten YA gangbangers stomping on you because you don't hang with their crew or because you are flying the wrong color, the wrong number, inside the wrong territory. And it don't matter if you're only thirteen, fourteen, fifteen, sixteen or seventeen, if you're banging then get ready to be banged on by your enemies who are eighteen, nineteen or twenty. They don't care what you're about in the streets, in the 'hood... there ain't no guns to protect you now lil' G, so you better learn how to survive real quick or you

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Peep Some Real Game Lil' Juvenile G's

What's happmg lil' G's, young thugs! G-Vo, lil' bato locos, cholitos!

So your sitting in your lil' cage right now probably thinkmg about how you were getting your grind on and runnmg crazy on the streets hustlmg your fast G's...right? Or maybe thinkmg about your first girlfriend, boo, lil' shorty, or some loved ones you are real tight with, hitting the B, and babysitting the Courvoisier , talkmg about, "pass the Henn and fire up that leño..."

Yeah, then you start thinkmg about how you're going to do it bigger and better once you get out, right? Talkmg about, " I'm going to hustle me a few big G's!, Get my blue ice bling blingmg and pick up some fine honeys in your new dream low, low on twin dub fours with Gucci leather seats, right? Right! Well as you get hyped up and your imagination has really taken a hold of your beating heart, you probably start believing that you are the toughest and smartest young g in the game — next to the big homie who just got out of the pen, whom you look up to. Or your dad or big brother who you envy because he is a prison G and everyone in the 'hood fears and looks up to him right! Yeah!

You probably start thinkmg I'm gong to be tough like him, in fact, you probably do a few push ups with your cellmate and some muscle exercises to get a head start early, right? You probably shadow box the wall a few times and trade gangster tales with another young G, while you get your one hour of recreation time, right? Talkmg about how you're about that or how you do the damn thmg with the blmg blmg, and chmg chmg, right? Right! Yeah, I feel you lil' G's, thugs, and cholitos talkmg about when I get back to the 'hood, the barrio, the homeboy is going to hook me up and we are gomg to hit the party with some firme jamas. Orale pues, simon lil' homie, we are going to hit the crazy scene...right? Yeah, I'm feelmg you lil' bato loco, I know that torica (rhetoric) real well.

You probably get on the phone once a day connecting with the 'hood, right, touching bases with a few close G's or loved ones that you trust, right? Right. Talkmg about what's going on with so and so and so's thizzle! "And what's up with that honey who lives down the street..." or maybe makmg sure nobody's tryng to move in on your part on your part of the block where you were sowmg up your fast G's, before you got caught up...right. Yeah I know what time it is lil' G's, lil' homies... you can't stay on the phone too long right, 'cause the loved ones ain't got big g's like you right?

Or, maybe no one answers your phone calls, 'cause you don't got a phone in the ghetto house you live in right? Yeah I know that feelmg too lil' G...! This just makes you more defiant in your feelings of lonelmess, pain, and weakness right? But hey, what am I saying or talking about!?! Lil' G's, young thugs, and cholitos don't feel lonelmess, pam, and weakness, right? Naw... we're street soldiers and tough bato locos, nobody can't mess with you right? That's right, I remember that part too!

But we will just keep it real and pretend those feelings don't exist, right? We're not ready to deal with pops beating us, or to talk about moms on welfare and spendmg that monthly check on her fix of heroin or coke. Or living in a broken home with divorced parents and drug addicted love ones, right? Yeah, we're not ready to talk about that kind of stuff as being a part of the cholo, thug, gangster world right? 'Cause the gangster life is about the big G's, the bling bling, low lows, and fine honeys. And being tough behind bars, behind the Juvi wall, the YA fences, and inside the prison trenches-holdmg it down like the bad OG's or loved ones who just got out the pen with tattoos and scars of domg time in the trenches or SHU's right? I'm feelmg you lil' G, lil' bato loco.

So you're sitting in your lil' juvenile cage lil' G, young thug, waiting to jump back on the streets faster than those pigs that snatched you up when you tried to run, right? You probably think that somehow you will be able to run faster or think quicker the next time you're about to get caught up, you will get away and run faster because you have spend a few weeks or months in Juvenile Hall right." Yeah, I've been there, I've done that!

So you're sitting in Juvenile Hall agam for the third, fifth, or sixth time talkmg about how you had the latest Gucci fit and Nike fit right ? Or how your Ben Davis threads were starched to an edge with your matching Charlie Brown and polished Stacy Adams, right? With the locs on, bangmg hard, mne on the side ? Yeah I know the style, that's my style lil' G, young thug, bato loco. So you're talking about how you're going to get the new hook up when you get out right, peeping your bow wows latest style so you can get your swerve on real tough right? Yeah, okay you're the lil' G, young thug, cholito who's trying to be like that prison gangster you see on your block, tryng to be like me in another time. Trying to be about something that ain't really about nothing when it comes time for you to pay the price of your life for all that gangster fantasy you thought was cool, for all that wanna be toughness that made you think you were about something — that is until it's your turn to be thrown into the fires of a prisons rage and see how you can handle the fire that will snatch your soul from it's place and forge your life into a beastly madness, until you have forgotten the look of humanity.

But hey! What am I saying, you probably didn't even understand that huh? Gangsters, don't talk all big and intellectual, right? I'm just fronting, right? Right...okay! Let me keep it gangster then and hit you with some real game from a G, a street soldier who was born in the streets, who ran wild in the ghetto alleys, who has been through Juvenile Hall, CYA's, and in prison all his life because he thought being a street soldier, hustler, and prison gangster was cool, because it was his dream growing up in the barrio, the 'hood, lookmg up to the OG's, like you are now looking up to your OG's, lookmg up to me in my prison jumpsuit with a shaved head.

So there you are sitting up in your Juvenile cage probably thinkmg, "Life isn't fare, you don't deserve this, it ain't right," that you have to stay in Juvenile Hall for six or twelve months, right? There you are blaming the system, the five-o, and everyone else you don't like and have a grudge against, right! You probably think it's you against the world right, and so you gotta get yours, like I gotta get mne and we both gotta worry about the next young G who's going to step on our grind and put his nine in the game, right! Right... okay! I know you lil' G, I know you real well. You think you're untouchable even as you're sitting in a Juvenile cage. You think you are invmcible. Hello!??! Knock, knock. You are in jail! You don't have your freedom! Do you see that spit stained wall and dirty window you have to look at everyday? Come on young G, look at that wall, that's the same wall I was looking at, fifteen years ago...! You probably see my mitials carved in the concrete bed or wall and you wonder who was that G, right? Right!

So you're sitting in your Juvenile cage thinkmg you and your boys are the boss of your 'hood, block even while you're locked up, right. As a matter of fact, now that you got a little Juvenile time under your belt you probably start thinkmg you're the G in your crew, right, and if anyone gets crazy, then you would just put the check down with your new tough Juvenile, street attitude, right? Right!

Okay lil G, cholito, young 'hood thug, juvenile soldier — while you kick it tough in your Juvenile Hall cage thinkmg about how untouchable you are and how you're "about this or gonna be about that," or how you blmg-blmg and chmg-chmgin' on the grind from noon 'til late night, but you ain't got nothing while you're sitting in that Juvenile cage still hiding your pain and silent tears in your tough street attitude of defiance.

Oh this bato loco, prison G, is going to share some real game with you young G's about what's going to be really happening in the future once you graduate from Juvenile and move on to CYA, where you will you will learn your first real lessons about playing with battery packs, gang riots, mind games, fist fighting and razor blades. And if you think you have ten or fifteen fights under your belt now, that ain't nothing once you get to CYA and you're banging hard, you better believe lil' G, you are going to

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WILLIAM GRAJEDA **Once again we are proud to havethis must read epic tale by William Grajeda in the pages of The Beat Without. The following piece he drops the bomb on the youngstas in the Hall, and we quote from a recent letter, "You wont need a dictionary for this one!" His hopes are that you all out there will think twice about the lives yo nare leading after reading this piece. With this said we encourage you to read on, dive right in! Write on, William! We all appreciate your thoughts, your stories for us all to embrace.**

Is This All There Is?

SUNMAN'SLIGHT *Although we received this as a personal letter (we have been friends for some years), it is so full of profound thinking that we had to share it with The Beat. From a near-lifetime spent in cages, this remarkable writer, now imprisoned in Salinas Valley State Prison, ponders the meaning of life, the existance of God — and concludes that whether one believes or not, the world would be a better place if all lived by the religious commandments that boil down to this: love one another.*

This morning I awakened with a question in my thoughts that caused me to understand that after 62 years, my existence has had little, if any, meaning. I sat upon the edge of my bunk; I looked around to seemingly, eerily, see for the first time the bare concrete walls of my cell, its steel door, my prison uniform folded neatly inside my metal locker.

At the age of nine years I sat upon another bunk, inside another cell at the Los Angeles County Juvenile Hall and looked around in the same manner, bewildered, feeling abandoned, scared and lost within a cold and uncaring world.

Again at the ages of twelve through seventeen years inside the cells at Nelles, Paso Robles, and Preston School of Industry, each an emotionally and psychologically abusive and destructive "Correctional" facility administered by the California Youth Authority. Except for seven years, I have existed in this manner since the young and tender age of nine. This morning I ask myself, "What happened? Why? Is this all the life I was given is to be?"

I am led to consider: I have loved, hated, robbed, murdered, been abused, have abused. "Is that life? Is this all there is? Or is there something always elusive until one's life is near end that will suddenly appear to reveal there has been purpose and meaning to what is past, and what is ahead? Will I at that very moment be given the prize I have sought throughout my lifetime, peace? Will it set me free for the first time since the age of nine? Or will I learn, as I have always feared, "life" is a mistake — a freak of nature?"

Here it is nearly day's end and I still have no answers, though I understand I had choices and decisions to make, and had I made the right ones, no doubt things would have been different. Would my life have been better? Would it have been worse? I cannot say. All I know for sure is it would have been different.

Should I try, I know I could never imagine the hell I have lived upon this earth getting this bad had I not been so angry that I refused to listen to anyone, believe in anything, and ignored that "gut-instinct" we all have.

I've no idea what is after death, if anything. People have a variety of theories regarding that. Most appear to believe in a God who promises eternal life in exchange for a "blind-faith" belief in Him or Her. Others believe we die and return to earth as someone, or something, else. Others are convinced we "evolved" from the dust and to dust we shall return. I have done a lot of reading on all these subjects. I have done a lot of soul searching. Any answers there may be have eluded me.

The world is so messed up it would be a terrible joke upon us all if there is nothing more after death. It is so screwed up that I am forced to reason that if there is not a God, we have reason to make Him up. Having read the Bible numerous times inside solitary confinement cells, my human logic could reasonably dismiss it as the writings of some con-man, or miserable people who needed a God to give purpose to their lives. Or I could accept and believe it all.

What I have done instead is conclude, God or no God, this would be a much better one if we lived our lives as if we knew we would go to some Heaven afterward. I am unable to find wrong in living life in accordance with the Ten Commandments. Does it matter who wrote them, or why? I do not think so within the hypothesis I write here.

I am forced by reason to question, "Why is it that those who believe that God did not write the Ten Commandments dismiss them as not worthy of their consideration?" Frankly, I am not a religious man, nor do I believe most, if any, of the stories written in the Bible. I have difficulty believing in a God who "sacrificed his own son out of His (God's) great love for us," and in turn allows so many children here on earth to live their entire young lives physically brutalized, and emotionally and psychologically tormented leaving them painfully scarred their entire lives. But, I damn sure know had I lived my life allowing the Ten Commandments to guide my judgment, decisions and choices, I would not have lived forty-six years of my sixty-two inside a prison cell.

The question, "What if there is a God?" scares the hell out of me. (No pun intended.) What if all we have heard about this guy is true, and in our arrogance, denied the possibility, however slight, that he exists, and went on about our lives as we are, doing whatever pleases us, and totally disregarding how anyone else feels about it? I say we would be in for a rude and miserable awakening far beyond any nightmares we suffered in this life.

What if when we die we learn we were wrong; that there is some guy with wings waiting to inform us, "You were wrong, Joe, Mike, Jimmy, Debbie, Lanna (whoever). You failed the test and now must pay the price for that failure?" What if instantly after we find our butts sitting on some red-hot coals realizing, too late, that our experience on earth was a cakewalk compared to what was then happening? For sure, every one of us has learned during our life to this point in time that anything is possible. How many times have we thought "no way" actually was?

I wonder how many people are gamblers like myself? I love the game of poker, and I have bet thousands of dollars on one hand many times. I have won, and I have lost. A good gambler is calculating and covers all bets. Life for me, as for most others, has been a "gamble" most of the time. Using gambler's "instinct," I surmise those of us "godless folks" who are miserable as the result of choices and decisions we have made, no matter the reason we did so, can only improve our miserable selves should we decide to live honorably, not steal, not rape and murder, do unto others as we would like for others to do unto us — all that stuff. Got to make things better.

vAm I on the right track here? Who knows? If we live in this way, even those who do not believe in God, and if we learn He does exist after we die, He might take into consideration that though we doubted His existence, we did live as He said we should, and covered our bases best we could. Maybe we should ask ourselves, "What do we have to lose? What do we have to gain?" The obvious answer is, we have much to gain and nothing to lose — God or no God.

Gambling with life.

MICHAEL OROZCO (4.27) We are very grateful to share this priceless work by our dear friend and colleague Michael Orozco. Michael is currently housed in the SHU, California State Prison Corcoran in Corcoran California. It is Michael's mission to teach and educate the readers of The Beat. Much love and respect Mike!

Where does gambling with fate lead to? Like the toss of a coin you chance a 50/50 stake in a wager. Chances are head or tails. Chances are...

What this world of prison bars and razor wires has to offer I'm well aware of. As I'm aware of what the free world has to offer. Yes in spite of my existence here in solitude there's a synthesis of two worlds. I've got my four thick walls that act as an enclosure in more ways than one.

I've also got my television that gives me a peephole to the world. So, even though I'm confined of body, of mind not so much so.

Theres a whole different world out there... I know about Kosovo and Serbia and ethnic cleansing. I knwo about political instability and economic concerns. I know about Chiapas and indigenous struggle throughout those regions, and of governmental clamps down, and its armed fist. I know about the Clinton and Bush's, campaigns; senatorial and presidential. I know about the recent shoooting drivebys tragedy in Chicago where once again racial prejudice has reared its ugly head. And of a railroad killer being over exposed on the nightly news. Doesn't the national media love a racial element to its lead story? Just wondering. In sports I know that recently the San Antonio Spurs introduced the Twin Towers and company as new NBA champs. That in Baseball Sammy Sosa's smacking 'em and that Jose Canseco's not to far behind. A '99 version of the Latino Home Run Derby. That the (Cleveland Indians) tribes serving notice to all. And finally that not only do we have Wild Wild West the movie, but a National League version as well, though my beloved Los Angeles Dodgers are just a footnote to this story.

But closer to home and lots closer to my heart the beat goes on with my family. There are marriages, births, seperations, up and downs; revelations of a varied assortment. I don't know the half of it, but splashes of insight are enough.

Now after all you have read it appears that I'm well informed and knowledgeable in worldly and family events. But pull back that appearance of knowing and what's revealed? Who am I? What am I? And more importantly, what's to become of me? There are questions in the questions.

Pessimism lives up to a distant horizon. I am one man at the gate of two worlds. I know the joy of freedom and the cruelty of incarceration. Be where I may there exists these two worlds. My soul bears the scars of this division. Once you've made the acquaintance of these four walls it becomes so difficult to shake them. Do you feel me?

Closer to here the free world exists. I could see it through the fences. There! Out there beyond that street! But looks can be deceiving because those "streets" are well out my grasp as my current status dictates. There are "dates" and required good conduct to obtain such dates. Good time, bad time, one third time, half time. Familiar terms. But for lots there is no such thing, not when you have life, or double life, life without (parole). For them, time is just that time. A calendar becomes a cruel reminder of things never to come. I imagine that? Having life without the possibility of parole; bottom line; you take your last breath in prison! Some proposition, but it's happened to lots, many more that I can't even write all of their names on this page...

But back to this four walled confine. Once you've been in here it's like you've been cursed. For now on you'll forever be waging a war to not come back, if you want to stay out you'll wage a war fought one smart battle at a time.

Once your in here you are at the mercy of a release date and you can't leave until that comes. But once your out it is your freedom indefinite. Just don't forget that it's easy to come back and that your just a hand cuff away from all of this.

These places have many names to disguise what they truly are; placement, juvenile hall, camp, boot camp, youth authority, correctional facility, training center, prison. It's all the same. How do I know? 'Cause it's my story starting at the age ten in juvies to now, state prison at the age of 34.

It's all good out there with the women, cars, and the lifestyle filled with the pride of a young Mexican intoxicated in freedom, family, and enjoying my union with a fine young female, the birth of my son, etc. Growing up strong in a family and church, nothing uncommon to the atypical young Mexican. But then it could be a case of being to presumptous and the next thing you know you've crossed over into ignorance.

Being an ignorant Mexican was never my intention, and I'm not, but at times when I've let my guard down it's happened as can well be attested too, by my present address.

Now I live in a world of cold cement, bars, razor wires and of armed guards, administrators, correctional officers. Of control button doors, of being hand cuffed to everywhere all of the time. In there is the air of death all around. Reminders are everywhere there are signs. Warning no warning shots, or a CO armed with an assault rifle eyeing our every out of cell movement. Then there's the lethal electrified fence meant to deter escapees to their very coffin.

Death is presence all around in the form of many guises and it's accompanied by this lumbering giant of a beast, this dragon that is the state of California, it encloses all about me and exiles me to these deathly walls and to a lonely existence deep inside to my bones.

So how to survive all this? Be strong and smart. Persevere, not just through iron will, but through knowledge. Be knowledgeable to what's on both sides of this spectrum. Don't leave your fate to chance. And remember that there's always two sides to a coin.

Out and about in the free world you flip a coin, heads you win, tails you lose. In here, heads or tails you lose, there are no winners. So quit taking chances, grab fate, your fate and become a winner through an education and by being involved with family. Don't leave your fate to the toss of a coin.

So how to survive all this? Be strong and smart. Persevere, not just through iron will, but through knowledge.

I am not the same person I was a year ago, nor will I be the same person a year from now.

CHRISTOPHER (6.41)What's crackin' with all you Beat folk out there! These next few powerful pieces were sent to us from Christopher aka Gangsta Poet, in a group home in Oakland. It's awesome when people step up and deliver something like what we have here, a real look into the heart and mind of a young man struggling to make a change in his life for the better. There's a lot of strength in these words. We hope you all appreciate them as much as we have!

Life

Life is such a precious gift, though the things it can bring will make you trip. I'm trapped in a cell, but I'm confined in my own mind. Though it's hell, I know I'll be out of here in no time. This ain't the life for me, what the hell was I thinking? I'm stuck in a sea of my thoughts and I feel like I'm sinking. So how do I stay afloat? You wonder how I cope?

I could take a drink or I could smoke some weed, pick a fight or make someone bleed. But look what it took to realie this ain't the life for me. Battle scars cover my whole body. I came so close to death, I started packin' a sawed-off shottie and boxing like I'm invincible.

I wanted to do good, but shhh, I never listen though. So where do I go when life turns cold? My role model sips on a forty bottle and in his footsteps I follow, grab the brew and take a swollow.

Since I was a kid I've been running the streets 'cause I'm sick of being raised by a dope fiend.

I'm hoping God really has a plan 'cause I'm too young to be a man. Was this life meant for me? I don't understand. But as I try to grasp reality, I slowly realize the agony. No one can love a bastard, maybe that's why they abandoned me.

Death and Ressurection

Hey, this is Young Sneaky. I'm now in a group home in Oakland. I write concerning my name, Young Sneaky. The name was given to me by OG's on my block when I was younger. Since then, I have grown a lot, physically, emotionally and especially mentally. I am not the same person I was a year ago, nor will I be the same person a year from now. I am constantly growing and changing. I refrain from immature behavior and adolescent attitudes.

Though I have stopped the gang-banging scenario, nevertheless I am still a gangsta and always will be. You can take this gangsta out of his hood, but you will never take the gangsta out of me. But it's just the mentality, you can choose to be a positive gangster or a negative one. I choose to be positive, so I stopped trippin off of colors. I am through with that childish BS!

Jesus said "when I was a child, I spoke as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child; but when I became a man, I put away childish things." (1 Corinthians 13:11) I couldn't have said it better myself.

My wish is that my life experiences expressed through my writings reach the open minded youth of the present and of the future, just as I have been reached. I hope to mold the minds of tomorrow to live more positively. Negativity only adds on the pain.

I just hope someone can learn from my mistakes and bad decisions. I sure have. So what I'm saying is, this is the death of Young Sneaky and the resurrection of Gangsta Poet.

My Poetry

Everything became clear as I looked in the mirror.
Couldn't recognie my own image, that tells me death is near.
And as the angel of death appears, I'm hearing bloody cheers.
Frightened by my own solitude, my heart became hollow and cruel.
So what do I do when there's nowhere left to turn?
Will God let me enter Heaven or send me to Hell to burn?
I beg for His forgiveness, but why should he forgive me?
I'm all caught up in this twisted life I'm living.
I'm admitting my mistakes and all my bad decisions
And I've decided to sharpen my mental precision.
I thought I heard the word of God, so I stopped to listen.
Loomed up toward the sky and found what my heart was missing.
Now I'm even more determined to rise up out of the slums.
I'm gonna hold my ground and stick to my gun's.
What once was fun now seems pure evil.
I'm not a violent person, I'd rather live peaceful.
But it's hard when you're around such heartless people.
And I'm locked up 'cause I'm the one who decided to carjack.
Now look where I was brought at.
And when I think of all the times I was shot at,
I'm surprised that I survived this long.
I've been told what don't kill you only makes you stronger.
Well if that's the truth, then I should have the strength of a thousand men.
Lord, why am I addicted to this life of sin?
Father forgive me, Satan's confronting me,
Telling me you stopped loving me.
I want to run, but he's holding me.
At the same time, that's all your showing me.
These are the words of a gangsta's poetry

Welcome!

Welcome to my insanity
Thoughts spin in a chaotic
Come swim with this shark, fool
Got the heart, then take a chance

Welcome to my hell
Visions of torture fill my head
Oh, I try to get a grip ya see
Too many people endin' up dead

Welcome to Satan's playground
I'm a mere puppet on a string
One, two, three punches to the skull
The world around me starts to ring

Welcome to my confusion
Every choice in life that I made
Distressed by bad luck himself
Tryin' not to go insane

Welcome to my barrio
If blacktops could talk they'd scream
Born and raised in the City of Angels
Was more like a murderous dream

Welcome to my resting place
How sweet the peace that's true
I wish I could share what I got
And give half of it to you

Welcome to the House Above
How God embraces me so tight
Dear Lord, forgive all my sins
So I can live my life a'right

Welcome to my world

Born and raised in the City of Angels
Was more like a murderous dream

SILENT SAM

(10.23) At the time Sam wrote these pieces. Including his hard-hitting poetry, he was, in his words, "not in the best state of mind..." because his death penalty trial was scheduled to begin in two weeks, making both his prose and his poetry all the more remarkable. We have not heard from Sam for a while, so we don't know his fate, or even if he's still at the West Valley Detention Center in Rancho Cucamunga, where he wrote these pieces. But we're pretty sure we will hear from him again, and we sure hope we do, for this talented writer has much wisdom to share.

Gangsta Blues

Trippin', sippin' skippin'
Never caught butt naked or slippin'...
Keep ya faith in this reality
Turn ya head from casualties
Wicked hands with fatalities...

Silent cries of sufferin' children
Gangsta blues sung while we chillin'
Put them straps away, stop killin'...
Voices muted out by unseen forces
Developin' skills in criminal courses
Shattered families, bitter divorces...
God knockin' off ya high horses
Silent cries which go unheard
Gangsta blues remain absurd...

Ya ain't feelin' me, ya got your nerve
Bounce that ass out and don't return
Infant babies in marble caskets
Hot heads in the 'hood causin' rackets
See an enemy and get to cap 'em
No gun, then ya stab him...

Silent cries as drowning puppies
Gangsta blues sung by 'hood yuppies
Stereotypical fat mouth nothings
Leave ya opinion to ya self, gee...
Silent cries
Gangsta blues
I can't win!

ORLANDO HERNANDEZ

(5.48) The Beat was saddened to receive this latest autobiographical poem from Orlando aka Chisto last week. Not too long ago he was working here at Beat headquarters. Now Chisto is sitting in the adult system fighting for his life. Yes his life! At 18 he may never see the free world again given the seriousness of his case. Well, Chisto use to respectfully write in our weekly workshops in SF/YGC and at the county ranch. We're sure we'll hear more from Orlando in the coming year.

Tears of a Soldier

The loud sound of sirens echo in my ears drums
The smell of gun powder still on my index and thumb
Flashing cop lights, pistols popping, bodies dropping.
Silent cries from the hood ain't stopping.
Can you walk in my shoes and survive?
Shoot outs, no more fist fights,
it's do or die in a zone of drive-bys
In a shooting battlefield or yet a concrete jungle.
Dodging bullets,
trying to maintain and live,
it's a struggle
A soldier's watery eyes, but no fallen tears
No more tears 'cause he wasted them
over the past few years.
With eyes clogged up he got a blurry vision
Who would ever thought
a good boy would become a menace from the Mission
No cure for them painful teary dripping eyes
Can you blame him when he was raised over sides?
Isolated in a section with boundary lines
Is it too late to repent and get forgiven
for the sins of all them times?
Two feet already buried in the dirt,
a dead soldier walking,
burning with hate in jail.
Damn, and people still wonder
why young kids sell their souls
to the streets of hell.

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My Best Friend

by Beneficial, posted Aug 30, 2004

At night road trips
Across the Golden Gate from the Bay
Double dates and debates
With best friends in the day
Justin keeps me in school
And helped me quit drugs
The only guy I can hug
And borrow his truck
Sometimes I wish
I could walk in his shoes
With the grades and the fun
And the talk about crews
But I am who I am
In a cell that seems fake
In this hell, where's my friends
And my barbequed steak?
When cooking at night
Justin's turned out the best
Then he'd point and he'd laugh
At my burnt cooking mess
He was a big brother
We didn't need to be hard
We'd rather meet girls
And sleep in the backyard
We spent whole days
Just cruising the town
The ladies were simple
So easily found
But when I met Rachel
That all started to change
Three of us hanging out
And the silence was strange
Two best friends made a schedule
That I soon found in time
But then Justin was busy
Never picked up his line
Even then I was happy
With the "love of my life"
Although nights I would dream
Of my friend as a child
Then I'd hear about Justin
Time and again
The girls he's slept with
His scholarship win
After three years of group homes
And placement type stuff
Her love became pain
Because distant was tough
She finally gave in
And declared us an end
I lost my freedom, my love
But got back my best friend
Now he has the girlfriend
Who was wild and strange
She was the ex of a gangster
Who has bullets for brains
He told me he loved me
And to stay out of trouble
Then his words became slower
As we laid in his puddle
His eyes then stopped moving
His limbs were sprawled sloppy
I stuck my fingers in holes
To keep life in his body
I blew air in his mouth
That seeped right back out
Then police came and grabbed me
From the back of a crowd
I wouldn't believe it
That my best friend was dead
I talked to his body
Kissed the top of his head
I wish it was me
But no matter the wishing
When I hang out with my friends
There is still something missing
So from now 'till the end
You are my best friend
And I could never forget you
'Till we meet again

Gone by Tougan, posted Jun 07, 2005

another funeral service
we are among
from different churches
confused faces
and what's worth it
to a young person
open coffin
the last goodbyes
with tears jerkin'
folks murdered in the past
and it's still hurtin'
mommas burdened
with plenty questions
and blank answers
these innocent souls
be roamin' off our own campus
and i swear it's a curse
when one dies
i can't help but realize
all these lost lives
hearts torn
and we all mourn
to the next dawn
silence crawls up on our lives
and we all gone
reminiscin' we sheddin' tears
as we share thoughts
just hopin' you make it through
heaven's doors
and brothers are reminiscin'
gettin' drunk becomin' wild
expellin' the alcohol
through empty smiles

Ten Seconds by posted Jan 14, 2006

he takes a deep breath sweat dripping down his brow hands rubbing together waiting one second mouth dry tongue numb two seconds eyes darting from here to there watching out for three seconds a loud bang sharp pain four seconds screams of sirens lights flash blue red and green promise five seconds someone grabs his arm breath six seconds he sees all black waiting seven seconds "open your eyes stay with us don't give up" eight seconds beeping and lines that define life nine seconds flat

Oakland Killings by John-John, posted Mar 26, 2004

To The Beat Within, I want to talk about the killing we have in one part of Oakland.

My friend De'Shanne, he got killed when he was with his other friends, and nobody helped him when this man hit him. And my other friend, JJ, he was from the other side of Oakland and some ninjas shot him. He was lying on his back hella long before the OPD came to help him. And my other friend, Tone, he got shot. Somebody drove up next to him and shot him in the neck.

Oakland is becoming a killing zone. I say that because all my friends are getting killed. I forgot about my cousin, CJ -- he got killed by his girlfriend. She had stabbed him ten times when he was asleep.

All these killings is going on in Oakland. They need to do something about these killings, because people's grandmothers and moms and brothers are getting killed in these streets, and my brother almost got killed. He got shot in the head and he lost one eye, so that's why I say Oakland is becoming a killing zone. To all my friends and my cousin that got killed, I love y'all and I will see y'all one day. RIP to my friends and family

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any seats or seat belts for them to use. However, Sisyphus was oblivious to this fact.

As the kids pulled past the gate, into the last stretch of driveway, they confronted some police cars that were blocking the road. Upon seeing the cars leaving from the party, the police moved out of the way to let the kids leave. This seemed rather strange because an observer would probably see that kids might have been drinking. Apparently the police were being lazy, and not doing their jobs well that night.

After pulling out onto the road, Sisyphus put his CD on and turned it to his favorite song. It was some real up-tempo music, so Sisyphus' adrenaline started pumping and his speedometer kept creeping higher and higher, even though he was on a pretty curvy mountain road.

Taking the turns fast, with everyone's weight flying back and forth, created excitement and energy in the truck. Sisyphus felt invincible, like he could never be stopped, and that nothing bad could happen to him.

Michael was loving it. He and Sisyphus loved to be reckless in their own ways. He expressed his feelings by screaming, so he could be heard over the lyrics, "You've never driven 'til you've driven with Sisyphus!" This encouraged Sisyphus to keep up his crazy driving, so he did.

After about thirty seconds of roaring down Hicks Road, Sisyphus came up to a turn that seemed to be a pretty sharp one. However, the moonlit road was playing tricks with his eyes. He pulled around the corner but turned his wheel too much, and his car began to fishtail in a way that was far from his realm of control. When the wheels eventually regained their grip on the road, the Suburban was facing forty-five degrees in the wrong direction, pointing right towards a whole bunch of trees that surrounded a creek bed. All this time the radio was still blaring.

Sisyphus slammed on the brakes, the wheels locked and then screeched, the passengers screamed, the tires smoked.

"Here is something..."

The truck hit the guardrail at forty miles per hour. It turned on its side with the driver's side of the car pointing up towards the sky. Trees were in its path, but "Big Blue" seemed merciless to them, knocking them down as if they were blades of grass.

"...you can't understand, . . "

CRASH! The window was smashed in by a branch that was stronger than "The Burb" expected. The glass flew into Sisyphus' and Michael's eyes, causing blood to start to trickle down their faces onto their clothes.

"...how I could just..."

Until this time, the trees weren't slowing the truck down much, but it was approaching a giant oak fast.

"...kill a man."

BOOM! The passengers all were jerked forward, but only Michael and Sisyphus were restrained by seat belts. Donna flew towards the back of Michael's seat. She went over it, hitting it slightly with her knee. She then flipped over the seat and fell towards the front passenger's window, which was facing the ground.

"Here is something..."

Davis was also hurled toward the seat in front of him, which was Sisyphus'. His head hit dead on the back of the seat, causing his neck to snap back. Lifelessly he fell to the ground, hitting his head on Michael's seat as well as the window that was parallel to the ground.

"...you can't understand..."

Sisyphus woke up from a daze, or maybe unconsciousness, he couldn't tell which. He looked around him, trying to collect his thoughts. Seeing Michael with his eyes closed and Donna in his window, he began to panic. He unstrapped his seat belt, fell towards the ground, hit Michael's seat, and aroused him. He looked in the back.

"...how I could just..."

There he saw Davis' lifeless body: alone, limp, and helpless. Sisyphus rushed to the back to try to help him. When he reached him there was a faint groaning noise coming from his nose. He was barely breathing, and Sisyphus knew that there wasn't much hope left.

".. kill a man."

Sisyphus cradled Davis' head in his own arms, and started trying to soothe Davis because subconsciously he knew these were his last hours. "Your family and friends all love you. Everything'll be just fine, you'll see," pleaded Sisyphus, even though he was sure he couldn't be heard.

"Here is something you can't understand..."

Sisyphus wept with Davis in his arms.

"...how I could just kill a man."

I Woke Up With A Smile On My Face . . .

by Traviesa, posted Apr 24, 2004

David: I woke up with a smile on my face. Today is the day no one will make fun of me. Today is the day I'm gonna make a friend. Today is gonna be a good day.

Narrator: David was picked on all through middle school and the summer before eighth grade. He decided 1999 was gonna be a different year. He went to the mall and bought a new wardrobe, and he got a new haircut. He had an all new makeover.

David: All right, here goes the first day of school. No one notices me yet. Well, time for first period. I think I'm gonna sit in the front today.

Narrator: At first period everyone started to notice David and his makeover, and they started making fun of him. During first period, as he went to sit down in the front of the class, this boy pulled the chair out from under him. This was the beginning. And it started to go the same as the last year.

(Fast forward)

Narrator: It's several months into the school year and he's been in six fights, has been stripped, and a whole lot of other pranks have been pulled on him. He's finally decided he's not gonna take it no more, and this is what he does . . .

David: Every day it's something, all I wanted was a friend. All I wanted was someone to like me and to not get picked on. I hate being alone [crying]. The only way for it all to stop is to die. Good-bye. [BANG!]

Narrator: David died alone in his room. He shot himself. He was an only child. Both of his parents worked full time. He never got any attention. And one day he got overwhelmed and gave up. I watched people pick on him and laugh at him. I even laughed, and I never thought nothing of it. He was a big dude. If he didn't like what was happening, he could've said something. But he never did. I wish I would've talked to him. But you know what he did? He made a change that year at Garfield, a change in everyone around him. RIP David.

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members). Sisyphus lived and breathed 7 Leaves, and everyday was writing new material and music for the band. At this point in time the band had about fifteen original songs with lyrics, enough for a CD.

Soon enough it was five o'clock, so the boys ceased their music playing outside and went inside anticipating Dave's phone call. After waiting about ten minutes the boys, who were bored out of their skulls, decided to call Dave for the sole reason that they were losing patience.

"Yo!"

"Yo?!?"

"Yeah. Yo. What's wrong with you?"

"Come on man, it's 2002, not the eighties. Catch up with the times, man."

"All right, all right. So what's up?"

"I dunno. What's up with those directions?"

"Oh yeah, my bad. I lost track of time. OK, you take Shannon all the way down to Hicks, take a right onto Hicks towards the mountains, and then turn up the first street on the right. The house is the last one on the street, behind the big ol' gate."

"Cool, man. When should we be there?"

"Come by in about an hour."

"We're there. Peace out."

"Late."

So the boys decided to finish off their weed, and then go cruising around Los Gatos for about a half hour before heading off to the party. Whenever they went cruising, they always had a cigarette hanging outside their windows, so they'd always receive dirty looks from the local soccer moms. They were perceived as the local hoodlums simply because they wore beanies and smoked.

These "hoodlums" decided to head over to the party a little bit early so they could leave time to get lost, and sure enough they did. However, they pulled up to the gate, and then entered the house around six-thirty.

Many of Sisyphus' friends were at this house. Actually it was more like a mansion. There was a pool, a vineyard, as well as a whole bunch of enormous rooms with extravagant furniture. This house could easily have been worth a couple million dollars.

Upon entering the house, Sisyphus was thinking to himself, "Why the hell would someone risk this nice-ass house just to throw a house party?" But in reality, no one can correctly guess a child's true motives, so this thought was lost soon enough.

To the bitter disappointment of the boys, there was never a keg at the party, which meant that they were beerless, an utter tragedy. This meant that they had to bum beer off of people, and do it fast. Michael and Sisyphus decided to go to the kitchen in search of some free drink. There they found about fifty beers sitting on the counter. Sisyphus took four, and Michael took as many as he could get his hands on. Then they walked out to the porch, and decided to chug them right then and there. Sisyphus got his four down by seven o'clock, and then decided to go out and socialize with his friends.

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A little less than a year before this party, Sisyphus was expelled from school for possession of marijuana. This caused him to be separated from most of his school friends and acquaintances, so whenever the opportunity arose, he jumped to the chance to be able to go out with his old crew. Mainly this occurred at parties, so this occasion was nothing new or special to him, even though it was enjoyable, at least so far.

After about two hours of chilling, playing pool, and reminiscing about the "good ol' days," (last year) Sisyphus met up with his friend Dave and went up on the hill in the backyard to kick back and enjoy the view. Right before they were going to start smoking some weed, Sisyphus noticed flashing red and blue lights coming up the road. "Oh shhh! I'm outta here Dave!" shouted Sisyphus as he began to run towards where his car was parked.

"Hold on man, just calm down!"

"Forget that. I'm out!"

Sisyphus ran onto the porch, which was one story off of the ground, where most of the people were congregating, and searched hurriedly for Michael. He found him along with some of his other friends. "Michael, there's five-0 here man! Let's get the hell outta here!"

So the boys jumped off of the porch onto some grass, and quickly headed for "The Burb." They got in, strapped on their seat belts, and Sisyphus turned the car on, put the gearshift in drive, and began to head forward. Sisyphus was in one of the first cars to leave, but his wasn't the first, so he couldn't just burn rubber to get out of there. After about ten seconds of driving at two miles per hour, there was a knock on the passenger side window. "Sisyphus! Sisyphus!" a voice said as the passenger's window was being rolled down.

"Yeah? Who is it?" said the driver. A girl's head popped into the window, and Sisyphus quickly recognized it as his friend Donna. At this point in time, they had known each other for about three years.

Brian first met Donna when she and one of his friends, Fred (his friends call him Fletch), were boyfriend and girlfriend. At the same time one of Sisyphus' other friends, Karl, was going out with Donna's best friend, Taylor. So all five of them, plus some others, saw a lot of each other. All of this was happening in the summer of the year 2000, when the kids were fourteen or fifteen years old.

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As most teenage relationships do, these two ended shortly and without much drama. But for some reason, Sisyphus and his friends, particularly Karl and Jason, kept up their relationship with Donna. During the hot days of summer the boys would stop by, knock on the door of Donna's house, and come on in, in order to take a dip in her pool. For some reason, she almost never went swimming with them.

Those three boys had remained good friends with her, until high school life began to tear them apart from each other. This occurred slowly but surely, so it wasn't painful. However the boys, at least Sisyphus, sure seemed to miss their lost friendship.

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Donna had a boy with her, who Sisyphus recognized as Davis. Davis was one year older than him, but that didn't seem to bother Sisyphus.

"Can you give us a ride? I can't find my car," Donna said. It seemed to Sisyphus that she needed a ride, and it wasn't like him to refuse an old friend of something as simple as a ride.

"Sure, hop on in!"

At the time, unbeknownst to Sisyphus, the seats in the back of the Suburban were all folded down, so the only appropriate seats were the two in the front where Sisyphus and Michael sat. The two new passengers didn't seem to notice or care (it wasn't apparent which) that there weren't

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How I Could Just Kill A Man

by A Round Silence, posted Jun 24, 2003

Ring, ring.

"Hey bro, what's up?"

"Michael, I've got some bud. You wanna burn or what?"

"What do you think? Head on over. My dad's gonna be at work until six."

"All right man, I'm there."

Just a normal afternoon for Sisyphus, a sixteen-year-old self-proclaimed "stoner musician." Returning from school, he always called his bros and wanted to know what was going on in his hometown of Los Gatos, what some may call a suburb of San Jose.

It was November twenty-sixth, two days before Thanksgiving, so there were some relatives staying over at his house. His aunt and uncle were there, as well as four of their children. Sisyphus' cousins, one of which looked upon Sisyphus as some look upon gods. Unfortunately, this attention and love from a seven-year-old hyperactive child wasn't exactly wanted from this particular teenage boy.

So seeking refuge, Sisyphus tells his mother that he's heading over to Michael's house to go play music. This was partly true because usually when they are over there, most of their time is spent "jamming," as they say, on guitars. However this was more often than not preceded by enjoying a pipe bowl full of marijuana that was meant to set them in the mood for a musical experience. However, Sisyphus' mom, who was teaching piano at the time, didn't seem to know, or want to know, why he was really heading over there.

Before stepping into his truck to depart for Michael's, Sisyphus remembers to grab a CD to listen to, preferably one that he hasn't listened to in a while, to enjoy on the ride over to Michael's. Rummaging through his disk collection, he finds the last Rage Against the Machine CD that the band produced before their breakup. One of his favorite songs from this collection is on entitled, "How Could I Just Kill A Man." Even until this day, Sisyphus regrets bringing this music into his car.

Running back to his '88 Suburban, Sisyphus pops the door open, hops into the driver's seat, turns on the engine, and listens to it roar. He loved this car: it wasn't his, it was his parents, but until he went away to college the truck was his to use. The truck's license plate said CABINHO, which referred to the summer cabin that his parents owned up by Dodge Ridge Ski Resort (CABINHO referred more to "Land Ho!" than to a prostitute that works in a cabin). Arlene, Sisyphus' sister, drove this car during part of her high school life and was ridiculed for being the cabin ho of Los Gatos High. Later in life, Sisyphus found this to be hilarious, and he never forgot the nickname.

Besides "Cabin Ho," the truck was also called "The Burb," "Big Blue," or sometimes "The Tank," but "Cabin Ho" was the favorite.

When Sisyphus would be cruising down the downtown strip of Los Gatos, all of the guys in his car would stick their heads out of the windows and scream "Cabin Ho!" while Sisyphus wailed away on the horn.

Another ridiculous hobby the group of guys would do would be to tell one particular restaurant that it sucked. There wasn't any real reason for the dislike of the Chart House, but it was there. So every time they drove past it, it was mandatory to scream as loud as possible, "The Chart House SUCKS!" The boys were rightly sure that this exuberant expression disturbed the diners sitting on the outside patio of the restaurant, but the kids didn't seem to care much.

Pulling out of his driveway in "The Burb," Sisyphus lights up a cigarette, inhales deeply, and then exhales the relaxing smoke. He calmly drives down High Street, where he lives, turns onto Loma Alta, and then rounds the corner onto Los Gatos Boulevard. In about three minutes he arrives in front of his friend's place.

Michael was waiting out on the grass in front of his apartment building with his shirt off, anxiously waiting for Sisyphus' arrival. One thing that was unusual about Sisyphus' friend Michael was that he was born with only one ear. However, most people didn't even seem to notice. He wasn't humble about it, but his personality overwhelmed all aspects of his looks. Sometimes Sisyphus, who had known him for many years, forgot he even had only one ear, because that didn't seem to be a conspicuous trait of his.

Upon exiting his car, Sisyphus slapped hands with his friend, said "What's up," and then walked with him into his and his father's apartment. Michael's father was a mechanic, and he loved cars. Their living room was filled with authentic model cars, as well as a whole bunch of tools that laymen could find no use for. It was very much a man's apartment, and was properly called "The Bachelor Pad."

The boys just began to smoke their weed when they were interrupted by a phone call.

Hello?"

"Hey what's happenin' man? This is Dave."

"What's goin' on, man?"

"Not much, what are you up to?"

"Sisyphus is over here right now, and we're just chillin', smokin' a little bud."

"Cool, cool. Well I heard of this fat-ass rager that's goin' down tonight up off Hicks Road -- are you down to rage or what?"

"Hell, yeah!"

"Alright, I'll call you guys back with some directions around five o'clock. Oh yeah, it's a keg-or-ator, so you don?' have to bring no beer, or nothin' "

"Cool man. Late."

"Late."

The boys suddenly became anxious about this party. They were trying to figure out how to get beer, but then rejoiced when they remembered that they were going to go to a kegger. Usually at keggers the boys would try to arrive early, so they could help finish the (beer) keg off before anybody else could. They did this so they wouldn't walk away empty handed from the party. Empty handed meant, more or less, not being drunk.

Upon finishing their weed smoking, the two friends went out to the front lawn to go smoke a cigarette, kick back, and play some music. Six of Sisyphus' friends, including Michael, formed their musical band, 7 Leaves. The band created most of their songs late at night in Sisyphus' garage. These events were called "Garage Nights." Garage Nights usually took place at around midnight on school nights, when the boys didn't have anything better to do. (Well they could've been sleeping, but to them sleep was to be saved for Saturday and Sunday mornings.) They congregated in the garage, which was filled with guitars, a piano, drums, a stereo, a TV, as well as a Play Station 2 and a hammock, in order to get real messed up and just hang out. Some of their favorite songs that they created there were "Tomatoes," (a song about tomatoes) and "The Lauren Song" (this song was about an overly possessive girlfriend of one of the

continued on next page

My Greatest Fear by White Goofy, posted Nov 16, 2005

My thoughts. When the heck is she going to pick me up? I got all ready, why does my girlfriend have to be late now? I guess I'll just stop waiting here on the porch and go back inside for the time being. Hell, I'll go and look in the bathroom mirror while I'm at it.

Okay, now I'm in the bathroom. Time to review my appearance yet again. Same clothes, same face, even the same shaved head as I had before.

I can't wait to spend a weekend in Tahoe alone with my girlfriend. I had to beg my dad and save up a bunch of money just for this. Is sixteen too young to purpose? Who cares? I bought this ring for her anyway, so that we can get married as soon as we hit eighteen. I think she'll like it—to know I'm serious about our relationship and want her to be my wife. Maybe I should brush my teeth again...

Honk! That must be her! Here I go to the door. I'm on the porch. Wait a minute! Whose car is that and what are they doing here?

Blam! Blam! Blam! I didn't see that one coming! Let's see if I can see who did it? I turn my head and they are already gone! Shhh! Here I am, two bullet holes—one in my arm, another in my chest! I guess I should call 9-1-1. I can't move! My body is cold, but the blood is so warm. I guess all I can do is lie here...

Meanwhile, in Liza's (my girlfriend's) mind: Damn it, the car won't start. Wait a second--the valve is loose! Twist, twist and voila! I hope that fixes it! Sit down in my seat, turn the key, and it started! Good thing my boyfriend's house is only five minutes away. I hope that he won't be too disappointed that I'm late. I'm backed out of the driveway and I'm going down the road. I'll just explain to him why I was late when I get there. Here I am, arriving to pick him up.

Wait a second, who's that lying on the porch? Oh shhh! Oh, God, no! It can't be him! It just can't be! I run to get to him. Just a little further. "Please don't be dead! I love you, please DON'T BE DEAD" I find myself screaming as I turn his body over. A pulse! Thank God! I better call 9-1-1.

Shhh, the door's locked! If only I could see right now, but tears keep flooding my eyes. I feel like throwing up, but I can't just now.

Hey, a big rock! Well, here it goes--pick it up and...CRASH. Yes! The window broke! Here I go. I'm through the window and am sprinting for the phone. My hands are shaking as I slap the number 9-1-1 on the keypad.

"Please state your emergency," says a calm voice over the phone.

"My boyfriend's shot and we need an ambulance," I scream over the phone, wondering how anybody could be so calm right now.

"Where are you located? "180 Pierce St," I scream, getting even more mad at the fact the person on the line still doesn't seem to care.

"An ambulance will be here shortly," says the woman, as I slam down the phone to go and check on my boyfriend, still lying on the porch. He's blinking! I would kiss him if it weren't for me being scared that would cause him a lot of pain.

"Stop moving!" I say, choking back tears and trying to sound calm. Meanwhile, back in my mind: I know that voice! "What's wrong, angel?" I ask. As she kneels beside me, I feel a sudden warmth surge through my body. Is she all right? When did she get here? Thank God! I'm going to be all right!

"Baby?" I say looking at her red face and teary puffy eyes. "It's okay. I called an ambulance. It should be here in a sec," she says, now completely failing to hold back her tears any longer. "I'm scared, baby!" "I love you," I tell her, hoping that wasn't the last time I would be able to tell her that.

"I l-l-love y-you t-t-toooo!" she ended in a particularly loud sob.

Wait. What the hell is she doing? Ow! This hurts like hell--being embraced by Liza as hard as she can. She smells like flowers. She wore her nicest, most expensive clothes, and now she is going to get blood all over them. Well, here comes the ambulance!

A few days later. How long have I been sleeping? "Liza?" I ask in a barely audible voice. I hear a sudden movement and look up to see my father and stepmother anxiously gazing at me.

"No, it' just us. Oh, what happened?" says my stepmother, crying suddenly and wiping her beat red nose for what must be the thousandth time, by the look of it.

"Where's Liza?" I say.

My parents give a scared look to each other and my dad finally tells me, "Look to your left." I look and I see her, not sitting on the chair next to me, but lying with a badly bruised face in the bed, in deep sleep next to me.

"WHAT THE HELL HAPPENED TO HER?" I scream, ignoring the pain in my arm and chest, as I start to feel tears of rage sweep into my eyes.

My dad looks at me with a concerned face and tells me... I can feel the world crashing down around me. "SHE WAS WHAT?" This couldn't be happening. I swore to her that that I would always protect haer and now this happens! Who could do this to an angel as pure and beautiful as she is? My angel! This is the worst pain that I have ever felt in my life, an unbearable pain that I have never felt before. Was she tortured by the same people who came and shot me? My father is still just sitting there looking at me. Stupid old man, don't you even care?

"I'm so sorry about this!" says my stepmother, sitting next to me, crying her eyes out, still hardly able to keep herself together. "I know how much she means to you!"

"OO YOU? OO YOU REALLY HAVE ANY IDEA HOW MUCH SHE MEANS TO ME? YOU IDIOTIC WOMAN! SHE IS MY WORLD! SHE IS MY EVERYTHING!" I scream, not even noticing that Liza had wakened up from her sleep. "HOW COULD THIS HAPPEN TO HER? I WASN'T EVEN TH-TH-THERE TO P-PR-PROTECT HER! I WANT TO D-DIE! I WANT TO DIE!" I continue, now crying uncontrollably myself. I look over to her just to see her bruised face looking at me with her beautiful tear-filled eyes.

"I love you," she says as I leap out of my bed despite my parents' sounds of protest, so that I can go to her and embrace her. It hurt my chest immensely to do all of this but I didn't care--my angel was harmed.

"I'm sorry! I'm sorry!" I screamed and kept repeating as I hugged her and we cried together. I couldn't believe that my biggest fear actually happened.

Conclusion. From this story, you will have realized my biggest fear! My fear isn't that I will be hurt or killed or any of that. It is the fear that I need to go through in here every day—that someone might hurt my angel and I won't be able to protect her.

My Demise by Ricardo, posted Feb 16, 2005

As I stand now, I plan on dying of old age or natural causes. I led a life of danger and every second I had to watch my back. At any time I could have been shot stabbed or beat to death. To me, now that my mind has matured, I believe I have taken my life for granted.

If I could go back in time I would have stayed off the block, and stayed out of gangs. If I continue to live the way I do, I know I'll die a fatal death. It'll probably be on the news but nobody will care. Just a loss of life. If you haven't recognized it yet, you better hurry and recognize before you find yourself layed out on the street.

To everybody out there living a thug's life, please do me a favor sit down and recognize where your life is going. Believe me I've witnessed myself, you're digging yourself into a six foot deep hole where your body will rest for eternity.

Rest in peace to my brother Ricardo.now that my mind has matured, I believe I have taken my life for granted.

Already Dead by E-tron, posted Apr 01, 2004

I remember all the way back
when my mom used to slang crack
and I never thought of payback
I just wanted to stay back
from elementary school
Cuttin' class and smokin' grass,
I was a damn fool, but now I'm a few years older
I'm still a young solider and growin' strong,
so I keep holdin' on to my wits
and never quit with my grip
that I try to maintain or I'll be insane
Strapped up in a straight jacket like a lunatic
I'm always doin' shhh that'll keep me in a cell
Livin' life is hell and my only way to make bail is if I die
I'm already dead in my own mind, so screw time as it passes by
I'm edgin' closer towards my last breath and all I say is screw death,
'cause my only escape from this earth is in a black hearse
Ever since my birth I been trapped in my own wicked curse
Haunted by the demons of my future and my past, always askin',
will I last to see my little brother grow up?
Drinkin' till I throw up I never gave a
Brawlin' with the enemies 'cause of what they said to me
Now I overlook childhood memories, where did I go bad?
Is it 'cause I never had a happy family like everyone on the TV?
Life wasn't always so easy, wearin' hand-me-down clothes,
sportin' secondhand fits with holes, with my toes poppin' out my kicks
Always quick to throw blows
Gettin' into fights was my whole life
Always stuck on my anger
I'm no stranger to the ugly danger of the evil streets
I got no proper seat in this world but in a cage
I got so much rage packed away inside my mind
I'm blind and I can't see
Trapped without a key, never to be set free from the evil in my own sin
Ever since the age of ten I wanted to be my own man but with an absent father figure it's hard to have a game plan
I still try as hard as I can to best, but with all the ongoing stress
I turned to smokin' sess and to violent crimes that I won't confess
Although I put myself in ugly situations,
the violence minimized the aches and pain
It helped dilute the evil in my brain,
even though it went away as quick as it came
My only aim in this messed up land is in the devil's plans
as I rest in the devil's hands
So here I stand but I'm not alive
I search deep inside the depths of my unsteady head,
and I realize that there's nothin' left. I'm already dead.

When I Heard My Mom Had Passed Away

by Roland, posted Dec 07, 2005

The last time I cried was when I heard my mom had passed away, and again when I went to her funeral. My mom was the person I talked to whenever I felt down about anything that was going on with me. She always knew how to bring me back, even if I wasn't trying to feel where she was coming from. When my mom got taken from me, a big piece of my heart left, and for a while, I would just get hecka sad.

When I would get to this point, the little things I would remember my mom and me doing together, and even just her speeches to me, would make me break down. It takes a lot to make me cry, but when I do — it relieves my soul and makes me feel better about the situation.

Man, I just always was wishing I could have said a couple of last words to her before she left me! I guess it was just her time, and I couldn't stop that from happening no matter what I might try. Now that she's gone, I really appreciate the things she did for me! I now know you can't take your parents for granted, because once they're gone, ain't no bringing them home. That will hurt anyone!

Murder by Young Ore, posted Sep 04, 2003

I never killed nobody, but a lot of my patnas died
All of 'em met death befo' they were twenty-five I seen a lot of mothers cry
On they hands and knees asking God,
"Why?" In the 'hood ain't no fightin' no mo'
Fists get swung, afterward 50-round choppas blow
Most murders don't get solved,
'cause nobody care I used to try until I learned that life ain't fair
I know my mama prayin' that her son don't get killed
'Cause my mind ain't the same, when I get off the ea pill
It feels like I can't feel love I sit on the block with a mouth full of drugs
But then I think about catchin' the slugs
I'll hate to watch my blood pourin' out my guts
Most killers start cryin' in them handcuffs
I'm surrounded by rapists, drug dealers, and killers
Punks, poodles, noodles, and squealers
Murder wasn't the crime I committed
Robbery was what I was convicted of
I pray fo' the family of the ones who didn't make it
I pray that the killers make it to God instead of Satan
Everybody can be forgiven fo' the things that they did
They probably don't think so, but in this max unit we are kids
On the streets livin' like grown men live
I hope most change they life to livin' positive
Murder is pain Another life lost in the game
Another man had lost his name
Sometimes I wonder if this world would change
President Bush should be convicted for killin' Saddam Hussein
This time in life this world is insane
But I can't really complain
'Cause in reality ain' shhh ever gon' change see you there
Instead of tryna live in all this fear
Rest in peace!

Rest In Peace by Rat-A-Tat, posted Apr 21, 2003

(Dedicated To My Grandparents)
You was there for me since I was lil' and always supported me
From the oldest to the middle child
I know you'll always love me
I stay with you from eight to when I was eleven
Now I'm starting to grow up
And one day hope to see you in heaven
The last time I seen you I had on my gold fronts
Now I'm in a eight by eleven cell
Facing another six to nine months I was locked up a few days before your funeral,
so I didn't go I didn't want to disgrace the family
By showing up in handcuffs and shackles
You picked grandma up a few days after you passed away
That's why I have to say, I miss her like everybody else do
I asked my PO if I can attend the funeral
But he didn't respond to what I had to say I've missed that one too
Now I'm stressin' hopin for beter days I hope you're watchin' over the family
'Cause we're the only ones who struggle
Everybody else is living life to the fullest
Without pulling a double Watch over my brothers
And please don't let them get into trouble
My sister needs to be a mom
Work real hard to feed her kids
Raise 'em right instead of letting them get did in life
My mom ... she over there stressing
Getting slapped around by her boyfriend
Hoping that you can give her some kind of blessin'
And as for me
That ninja lucky I'm locked up again in this messed up county
PO over there pushing the boundaries
That's why I want to move back to East Oakland
I can't do a damn thing about this situation
But only hope that you'd guide me through these frustrations
Watch over the family and me
'Cause I wanna go in the right path
Start over with my lady, and maybe have a blast Damn,
I really miss ya!

Learning A Lesson The Hard Way

by Drewski, posted Sep 07, 2005

Ever since me, HK and Bugga, been a click, takin' off on cats that got out of pocket, my grades in school started droppin'! I was going to Emery Middle School in North Oakland while they both attended Lowell Middle School in West Oakland. My teachers became concerned about my work and my poor attendance. Finally I realized what was happening with me in school, and I got myself out of the gutter and back on top in the middle of the intersection where I could still choose which road I wanted to take.

Then the unexpected happened — after I had got right again at school, I went right back into the gutter! One day at my home, I was sitting in the living room, almost done with my homework, when my grandma called me into her room. She said, "Andrew, can you get me some water, baby?" I then picked up her cup off her nightstand and went to get her some fresh water with ice. When I came back, she told me to take a seat by her bedside. So, I was choppin' it up wit' her for a while, and she finally told me to go finish my homework, and after that I could go next door to my patna' house and play PS2 wit' him.

The only reason why I would go over there on the real was to chill wit' his sister! But anyway, I was done wit' my work, and I told my mom and Granny that I was going next door. When I got over there, my patna told me that he was at his home by himself, and he knew I was looking forward to talking to his sister. So he asked me if I did I want to sit and get scraped in his video game, since his sits wasn't there. I was only going to go around the block to meet up wit' Bugga and HK at Pop(u)lar Park, so I decided to go ahead and play a couple of games with him first.

We were playin' the game, and soon I was jumping up and down 'cause I was winning. When I finally won, I stood to my feet talkin' shhh to him — it was my first time beatin' this ninja! He would always beat me whenever we played, so when I finally won, I was talkin' dumb trash to him. But all of my celebrating stopped short when I heard yelling and screaming coming from my house!

I instantly ran back over to my house to see if everyone was okay. With my gun in my hand, I rushed toward where the screaming was coming from, only to find my mom and Granny. My mom was standing there screaming while she was trying to hold up Granny — who was throwing up blood! I quickly put my "little friend" away (the forty-five) and called 9-1-1. My granny who had fallen to the floor, got up and stumbled her way out the room and onto the front porch, still throwing up blood!

When she looked up at me and my mom, her eyes were rolling back in her head — and she said, "It's time, baby. It's time." She almost fell down the stairs, but I caught her. Then she gently rubbed the side of my face, and passed away. She died in my arms!

My Dad's Funeral by Shotgun, posted Mar 15, 2006

I was sixteen when my dad's funeral took place. It was only about a mile away from where we lived, at a mortuary. We didn't have a lot of money to get him one of those fancy funerals. What I find to be ironic is that a friend of mine lived behind the mortuary and had a soda machine where you could get a can of beer for 50 cents!

My dad had got close with a lot of my friends 'cause he was a very talkative person and he had already been through a lot of the same shhh that we been through. So when he passed it hurt a lot of my friends also. He had a lot of friends from bowling, playing softball, and just being a friendly person. So as you can imagine, we filled up that little funeral home.

One of the most memorable moments for me was when my brother and I and all of our friends who were attending (about twenty-five of them) walked from my house the mile or so to the place where his funeral was gong to take place.

We were all fitted in our suits and just having a good time in the loving memory of my father. Just recently my mom told me that her sister was worried that me and my brother were in a gang when she saw us walking down the street like that. The funeral itself made me so proud of my father. I never knew that so many people had love for him. And the things they said about him made it feel like my heart was being pulled from my chest. He had an open casket funeral, and I don't know if you have ever attended an open casket funeral, but it was the weirdest thing seeing him there. He was so cold and stiff like he was just pulled out of this fridgerator.

I remember when the time came for everyone to leave, I just couldn't. My dad's best friend came and told me and my brother that he would always be there for us and that's when I just couldn't take it anymore, there was too many people trying to talk at once. Afterwards, my bro and I along with our friends walked back to the house and proceeded to drink and smoke until the early morning hours, but that's a story for another time.

Life Or Death In This Cold-Blooded Game

by Fireball, posted Feb 18, 2005

It's so much traffic tonight I'm
about to get this dough
Walking wit' my boots on all
the way to the knee
Tight miniature shirt high
enough but not showing
everything
Gotta keep 'em guessing
what's under
Black strapless top, nails, feet,
hair done
Earrings, lip gloss, just
enough to keep 'em shining
Looking hella good
These broads hating 'cause
I'm getting all they doe
150 here, 200 there. Fosho
It's popping Made my nickel
within a hour
It's all about getting dough
So I'm going in the house, oh
no
Ring, ring cell phone going on
Hello
Hey how are you doing?
You want me to meet you
where?
Okay, in an hour
Hit my daddy up got a date for
5 in a hour
Time to get back on p's and q's
Walking, the weather is
starting to pick up
Got to keep it moving
Hit the corner
Oh shhh here come some
pimps trying to pimp on me
Do it moving across the street
One on that side two coming
towards me
Gotta make a move and do it
fast
Call my daddy Take out my
phone
Dial the number
Damn, cell phone just dropped
Bend down to pick it up
Feel a something feeling my
hair I can feel my hair coming
out
Trying to run and get away, but
can't move
Turn around,
Damn pimping got me
"Let me go please" Now bitch
you coming home to some real
pimping
Hear a car pull up, doors open
Feeling pressure on my back,
but fighting back
Something sharp comes to my
neck
Feel it coming so deep and
strong
Don't cry hold back ya tears
But, they're coming out like
rain falling from the sky
Get in the car
Okay I get in, in the back,
Look around for something to
use as a weapon
Shhh it goes black
Hands tied behind my back
Feel something in mouth
I can taste the rag it taste like
old must
And other shhh I can't
explain I can smell the air,
Smell the weed they smoking
And the drank they drinking
Remy, I wish I could just die
What the hell is going on?
Head spinning seeing stars
I must be going crazy
Thinking about all the things
that happened in my life
Every thing is moving so fast.
It hurts Oh God why?
Help me out I can't deal wit it
Just let me go Blackness

WILLIE CLAYTON

Read this poem and shudder, he writes like a modern-day Edgar Allen Poe. There's doom in his words, but beauty too. Clayton reminds us that there is no shadow so dark, no night too black, that it can't be described in a way that sheds light on the human soul.

Dipped in Blood

Salvation has called my name once before, crawled
hallways of hopes and dreams I seem to always ignore

Some one had put a plate of grace in my face, but
dipped in blood it was soon forgotten.

Passed over for judgment I wonder endlessly without
a torch, missing the point of a wrong life style I never
knew that Satan would be on my front porch, dipped in
blood.

Tormented burning in hells fire, fainted memories of
long ago that heaven and hope could have been a life
time desire...

There's nowhere to hide even in the dark, now thinking
of all the mess I've created was a joke or maybe just a
simple walk in the park

Trying to find ways to redeem myself in flames with
every step leaving a trail of fire, past mortem flesh
avails hoping to be saved by a power that's much
higher

Mama "told me that this pain would never end, wishing
more and more that I was a good man with God as my
best friend

Running in place still playing with my face covered in
dirty mud, that I would be free from hell, and Satan's
grip, if only I wasn't dipped in blood

TROY BULLOCK

Street life is nothing nice – you say it us all the time, and Troy Bullock has been around the block enough to say it rhyme. Listen to his words, they're cold and full of tears/let them show you why, that road is full of fear.

Holla Back

When I go, who the hell is going with me?
If the streets take me would you ride or just forget me?
You will probably this me because you always show
fear.
A coward in the truest form and for you shed no tear.
Remember me, the one that blazes blunts?
The one that kept it through and never pulled a stunt.
The one that gave you life.
I stood you up on your feet when cats were trying to
return you. I'm the one that gave you heat.
The streets are so cold, keep your business to yourself,
'cause loud mouth people is bad for your health.
What about them broads, man you know the deal.
Shout out they love you and fake a orgasm for real.
Remember me, I had some of the baddest Chicks.
Hit the pen for a stretch, now they isn't worth nothing.
Put them with the rest and cook them up like some
gumbo.
Never show your hand cause on the streets, that is a
No-No!
Shout it out, make it clear. Blood, sweat and tears. No
struggle, no strife. Never crossed a soul to those who
didn't deserve it.
If I brought the biscuit, best believe you deserve it.
Shout out to my Brothers.
Man they keep it real. I'll shed a tear and draw blood,
vice verse is how they feel.

KAY

KAY Chooses a sad topic, yet this poem still ends on a message of hope – the hope and love for a child, the promise of homecoming, the most we could ask for as we close out 2007 and get ready for 2008. We are counting on all of you to help make it a brighter year. Peace and love from all of us.

Hello All

I miss my home girl Devmica R I P
Hi! My name is Kay Kay, and I'm holding it down in
state prison doing 25 years without life. I'm only 24
years old, and my release date is 2003. When I get out I
will be 47 years old.
So anyways, I would like to dedicate this poem
to my homegirl Devmica RIP.

Devmica RIP

I hold this knife in my hand,
and wonder to myself how much more can I stand?
All the people here are mean, they treat me like dirt,
they spit on me and laugh, and inside, make me hurt,
my one and only joy in life has left me alone here,
my one and only true home girl died just last year,
I can sense the end coming near
I'm so sad, but I can't shed a tear,
I see the light beginning to fade,
And I think to myself, I should have prayed,
I close my eyes and put the blade to my wrist,
It seems to e the easy way to end all my sadness.
I felt a warm glow, then I heard a soft voice,
It was the spirit of my homegirl, telling me I had a better
choice,
"God" will help me to have courage, help me to be brave
be showed me his love and my life he did save,
I will like to give a shout out to my baby mother Ty're
Prica,
I love you in my daughter so much and I will be home
soon,
So keep praying for me, and "God" will blessed me to
come home to you
and my daughter, because one day I will be home with you.

An Ugly Death

I then see a lot of death around my hood.
Then seen my own patna head full of holes outside my house.
I then been to too many funerals
of young people that I grew up with and even family.
I can even speak for myself
I almost experienced death too, by being shot,
but God was with me and He wasn't ready for me to come up.
And I'm happy to still be here and I'm very blessed.

-Keith

From The Beat: You should feel very blessed. There has been a lot of people that have been shot but didn't make it. Why do you think you did? Do you think you are here for a purpose? Maybe God wanted to give you an opportunity to do something else with your life something that might affect a bunch of other peoples lives, besides come to jail or live around negativity.

A Part Of Me Died

When someone in my family dies, a whole part of my life dies with that family member.

See, where I'm from, I come, a young gang member banging a proud life. The streets call me Midget. When someone dies that's really close to me, a part of me dies with him.

I see my life as just a rolling roulette. One day, I will earn my respect and stripes. One day, I either lose my life or my patna's life. It's a cold world I live in, but the only reason why I keep my head up and watch my back from them playa-hating people is that I wouldn't want to die and let my family go to my funeral so young.

-Midget

From The Beat: It is a cold life. Why do you feel like it's the only option for you? What if you end up in the pen? The pen is as cold, if not colder, than the streets. We hope that you will think more about the choices you have made and the kind of life you want for yourself and for your family. Your choices affect innocent people.

Death

When my grandma passed away I was like 9 years old. All I remember is all the good times with her.

I be wondering if she look down on me sometimes when I be doing the things I do. I wish I can make her happy cause right now I think she not very happy with me 'cause of the things I do. But it's my time to change for my family and the people that love me. RIP Grandma Jody.

-Taliban

From The Beat: We're sorry to hear about your grandma. We feel you. And you're probably right. Your Grandma is looking down on you and she's probably not that happy with you. But you have an opportunity to change while you still young right now. Get out, and don't come back. Stay focused and go spend some time with your family and the people that love you. We don't live forever, so take advantage of that while you still can.

Losses

Once I lost someone that I was really close to it was my grandma she died four years ago. I did a lot she was the best lady that you can ever meet. She went to church and everything and when my mom had no one else to go to she was always there for us. She would let us stay with her if we needed to and she would buy us clothes, food and everything. She was always there for us.

I loved her so much. When she died I took it really hard and I was thinking to myself I couldn't believe that she was gone because one minute she was there and the next she was gone.

-Grandson

From The Beat: Your grandma sounded like she had a big heart in general, especially for her family. You describe her as a very sweet lady yet we never met her. She is probably watching down on you right now. It's hard to lose the people we love. We understand that. But we hope that you can gather up enough strength to keep it moving and live your life in a positive way. Don't come to jail please. Make your grandma proud and live your life to the fullest without going to jail, or to the graveyard.

RIP Haunt

Salvador Nieves, my patna, died in 2006 he died in a car accident. He was 21 and just out of jail. We had a BBQ the day he got out. We were gonna go fishing at Lake Berryessa, but the tragedy happen. We were neighbors.

My uncle and my dad had told me that my friend was in a car accident and they told me that he died.

I freaked out I started punching walls until my knuckles bled. He was even alive after the accident and the car in pieces.

A van hit him. The van ran through a stop sign and struck my friend, as it was being chased by cops, who did not have their sirens on.

Salvador was unlucky. He was at the wrong place at the wrong time. The van hit him at 85 mph, he was in a Altima car, yet when he was hit he loss all his clothes, even is shoes, wallet, plus he just got paid his paycheck from his job at this restaurant in Alameda.

RIP Haunt.

-Luis

From The Beat: Wow, that is very tragic. We are very sorry to hear about your friend. Our prayers are with you and his family. Whatever happened to the cops? Did anyone get charged for his death? We know that won't bring him back but don't you feel like the cops were somewhat responsible.

Money Is The Reason

Money is the reason people die
Money is the thing people use to hire hit men
A precious life taken for money
Children are getting took away
Cause their parents don't have enough money to support them
But rich people spend millions on houses
They make it seem like being broke is a crime
Money is the reason for robbery check fraud burglary identity theft
People do these things for money
And if everybody in the world had the same amount of money
It still would be somebody who wants more
And when you have money you can get away
With things that a broke person couldn't
And it could be the same crime
Isn't that unfair money is the reason.

-Young Mari

From The Beat: Money makes the world go round. Money is responsible for all the drug dealing, penitentiaries, murder, check frauds, you name it. Why is money so addicting to people? Sometimes we have money but we yet we still feel broke. Do you think we are too greedy?

Thinking Dt the Word Death

Q-vo beat? It's O from Hayward. Well what I think when I hear the word death is that everybody going to die someday but some people choose to live longer than others by staying out of the streets, but even if people stay out the streets they still might catch a bullet while sitting in there living room sofa, a bullet ain't got no name, you never know when you are going to die, that's why I try to have fun everyday while I live, either in jail or in the outs.

Some people don't care if they die or not because they been through some shh. All I care about is leaving my family behind.

-D

From The Beat: Its sad, but yet a *fact of* life that even innocent bystanders *catch* bullets because *of somebody else's* senseless acts. But that don't mean that you have to live life like there's a bullet out there with your name on it. Some people have put themselves in a position to have a bullet with their name on it. Live it up and have fun but it's on you whether you want to be a victim to the gun violence, or not.

A Death Trip

Death is a trip I can say
Some people real some people fake
I can relate to this so I'm telling you today
Would you rather die in your sleep or by that k
People always talk shhh that how stuff get started
Then when drive-bys happen they hit everybody but their target Some people get excited and run their mouth
I been to so many funerals I think I lost count
You shoot they shoot that still ain't equal
Guns don't pull the trigger people kill people
No matter what happened I'm gonna always get bread
Death is so close I'm wit' 'em one minute then they dead
Some people say they hard some say they souljas
I see death around the corner then yo' life over

-Lil' D

From The Beat: Yes it's *true* death is a trip/ You can die from one shot, you can die from a full clip/ guns kill people, people pull the triggas/ browns against browns, and ninjas against ninjas/ Why does everybody wanna be hard, why can't they just be real/ Why can't they act themselves without claiming they *solid like steel*/ You've seen all funerals and countless people that have *died*/ You seen all mothers and fathers, uncles and aunties, sisters and brothers, and all the cousins that cried/ Why keep talking loud and playing with guns? Why?

Death Brings A Bad Vibe

When I hear the word death I get a bad feeling like something bad is going to happen. So I forgot about the word death and put good feelings in my head to make me think about a good life.

Death is a word that people should not know about or think that death would happen to them next because death is the most painful thing about life. That's why I hate death.

-Hurt By Death

From The Beat: Death is a *very painful* experience and we're not talking about the person who dies. We are talking about the person's family and friends. Death is also part *of* life. We have to deal with it whether we like it or not.

Death

Comes to all but it only comes once. But for me death was an occurring thing I've witnessed homies and family.

I've had people die in my arms. Even though I ain't dead physically, I've died a little every time my people died.

So to all my lost folks Magic=Arturo=Romero=Morenta=Clown=Criminal=and Jerm stay up I know you watchin' down on me I'll see you alrato.

-Smokey

From The Beat: We feel like you might be a little wrong about death coming to *us* all just *once*. We think death comes at us all way too many times. Just like you had several of your homies die. Thats death talking to you right there. You *mentioned* seven homies, thats seven times death has had an *effect on* you. Maybe death is trying to tell you something.

A Tattoo Dt My Mama

I would get a tattoo of a picture of my mama face and her name on my chest or my back or something.

Or if I was to have a son or daughter I would get they name or my niece or nephew, or like if somebody in my family died, I would get there name saying RIP. Or if one of my real ninjas got killed I would get there names or hands praying and a scripture or Jesus or something but other than that nothing else.

Anyway I'm doin' cool though, holdin' it down doing this time. I'll be back soon.

-Roland

From The Beat: We're glad to hear that you are doing cool. We hope that you don't have to get any tats representing any of your peoples and family.

Killing Me Softly

My unknown lover I think about you everyday
If we were face to face I wonder what I would say
Expect we haven't seen each other in a while
I've been thinking about your pretty eyes and forgiving smile
I remember like it was yesterday the things we use to say
You said and some things you did made me mad
But that's the past
I don't see how you got into this lifestyle you were so young and so sweet And you let him take advantage of that
I couldn't believe my eyes
When I seen you doing you know what
I felt like crying
But I held it inside
I can't blame you
I know the deal
Ne Ne I'm just telling you how I feel
I hope what I say make it better
It's true good things don't last forever

-Young Mari

From The Beat: Good things don't last forever, but then again nothing lasts forever. Why *do* you love your lover so much if she seems to hurt you *so* much. The past is the past and you have to let it go whether that means dwelling on them memories about your lover. Its not healthy, you need to be focusing on your problems, and how to stay outta jail.

RIP Brian "Paco" Champeco

Have you ever had a very close friend die? I have! We grew up playing soccer together when we were five. We got locked up together, we went to a group home together, we had our ups and downs but when he was taking away from us I wanted to die.

He was killed after he participated in a drive by. He wasn't expecting to get shot back at but he did he got hit twice. Dead on impact. He was 17 years old, it was not his time to go.

His name was Brian Champaco. Died February 27, 2006.

Rest in paradise bruh. I don't know how to get over it. I don't think it's possible to forget someone you loved like a brother. There is nothing you can do to make them come back.

-Josh

From The Beat: No, you can't bring him back. You can't at all. But what can you do? You can live for him, live for his memory. Imagine yourself out on the front porch in twenty years, maybe with two children sleeping inside, a wife you love. You're tired from a long day's work, but you feel good because you paid for your house out of money you earned, and you're good at your job. Maybe it's a lot of stars out at night. You look up to the stars and tell him this life is in your honor. Never forget him, but remember him right.

My Life So Far

What's up Beat. This is yo' boi Repo back up in this hellhole. I can't believe this shhh. I just left two months ago to a placement, after being here for months.

I've missed so much stuff: The whole summer, my birthday, and now I am gonna miss Christmas and the third New Years in a row, all because I ran from a stupid placement.

But I made it worse; I got caught in another case of a high-speed chase. Now I just gotta sit here and for the judge to say he's sending me to CYA because of my last case.

But maybe it's for the best for me in the future.

That's all I'm looking for now, screw all this lil' kid stuff, always running from the cops, drugs, hitting licks. It's over, it's time for me to grow up and become a man for my family and my girl and most of all for me.

Well that's it wish me the best late

-Repo

From The Beat: Its difficult to be away from those you care about during the holidays, but if you stick to this serious plan of yours, this New Years might be the very last you ever spend locked up. We hope so – we really admire how you ended your writing by stepping up to the plate and recognizing that it's time to make some changes for your family, but most importantly for yourself.

You Will Always Be Alive

I knew you since I was two
We was kicking it just me and you
From stealing candy to stealing cars
We was locked up together behind bars
We both had a Asian pride mentality
How you died was a fatality
I remember us both getting high
Even though you're dead you will always be alive
Rest In Paradise
Joe Lni.

-Korean Pride

From The Beat: We hope you don't mind that we chose this title for you... based on the wonderful line celebrating the fact that you will love Joe and preserve his memory forever.

Action Of Death

What's good with it Beat.
Death is a hard thing to accept for
Some people, some people can't accept it
At all
There is no way a person can
Explain how death feels but the
Way I feel about it is nothing
To talk about.
It would just be crazy

-Tony

From The Beat: Its true – Death is such a mystery, and anyone who hasn't experienced it is in no position to tell us what it was like. We liked the ending of this little poem "it would just be crazy." Death – and life – are the two craziest topics there are. Maybe that's why we picked them!

Two Wonderful Things, The Life of My Daughter

To me life and death are two wonderful things. To some people death is a sad thing but to me it can be looked at like an obstacle of life.

Life is a wonderful thing to experience. Me I have witnessed life coming into the world. My daughter Brianna. I was only 15 and about to be a mother. Her father might be 25, but I am still the one who takes care of her.

The man who has been in my life is the man my daughter calls dad. He loves her just like she was made from him. People call him "the king" so to us she is a princess. Our wonderful princess.

-Crystal

From The Beat: Crystal, we've seen you grow from a scared girl to a proud young woman. We hope that this new man treats you and your baby the way you deserve, and that you continue to grow and find yourself and become strong as you face life's challenges.

That Word Ugghh!

Something bad comes to mind when I hear the word death. I feel that it's not fair to kill or people just die for no reason. Death is a strong word and I think nobody deserves to have the death penalty in jail or the pen.

-No Name

From The Beat: Death is a strong and nasty word. And you're right nobody deserves the death penalty, jail, or the pen. What can you do to fight the death penalty? Why do you think people feel like they have to kill people for no reason?

Death

If I were to get a tattoo I would get a tattoo that represents death. I pick death because it would remind me of somebody who past away.

-Lil' K

From The Beat: Who passed away? Was it somebody close to you? Would the tattoo be a way to honor their life?

Life is A Why

Why do people make decisions, when they know it won't work?
Why do people do wrong, when there is always a right?
Why do husbands cheat, when they suffer to love their wife?
They move to the hood and sell coke to survive in life.
That's like if you meet Beyonce, you'll forget about your wife.
If there is no wrong, how can there be right?
If there is no bad, how can you live the good life?

-Cameron

From The Beat: These are the true "why's" of life, but maybe that's what humanity is about: our contradictions. We can do the greatest good, the greatest evil. We can have the best intentions, and then hurt our beloveds. We can find a moment of happiness in a place like Juvenile Hall, and then suffer inside while surrounded by family. What does it all mean? We don't know. Only that with minds and hearts like yours facing the questions, we have a little more hope that one day we'll have some answers.

This Place is Death

What's good Beat? This yo' boy T and I am back in here again in the same pod and everything. I feel I know I can stay out. It's just lil things that bring yo' boy back. It's time for me to just grow up out here ya'll.

-T

From The Beat: Man, back again?! Am there lil things worth coming to jail for man? Come on, you almost said it. You need to grow up period, and don't let the little things keep you from doing it BIG!

Life

Life is hard when you live somewhere with bad influences around you. Where in every corner you see people are trying to get their money. But still you see them getting killed for stupid reason. But that's life when you live in the hood all they tryin' to do is get their money. But nowadays people get killed for saying the wrong thing.

-The truth

From The Beat: Nowadays people get killed for anything. People get killed for not moving fast enough down the escalator at the movies. Why do you think it's like that? Why is there so much hatred?

Life

Life like the topic said there is a good side to life and there is a bad side of life. It's a trip if you take that trip in a positive way you would get away with it.

You play it dirty your gonna end up under the ground six feet down so like what I'm doing is trying to take my life the farthest I can. I'm trying to survive in jail get off probation and continue with my life.

Like a lot of people say life is a joke if you tell the joke in a good way it's going to be all good. If not it's bad. So what I'm doing I'm trying to make my life better by learning from my mistakes so I wont make them again.

-Marco

From The Beat: We're very glad to hear that you are learning from your mistakes. That's the part of growing up in life. Learning from your mistakes means that you are getting older and wiser. However if you keep repeating the same mistakes then that means you're just a knucklehead. Congratulations! You are on the right path to get off probation and continue with your life.

Death And God

When I hear the word death I think of God and how when It's time for you to go it's time for you to go.

I think about my mom and what would she do without me.

I think about my ninjas on the block and how I should be there when times get hard 'cause on my block we all family.

When I think about death I think about a gun and how yo' life can be taken in one shot or the whole round.

I think about my grandma and how she would always stay out of trouble.

But one thing I think about is my dad and how he was a low life and never really in my life.

Death is something that no one deserves but if you mess wit' my family ninjas is gone have to die. That's what I think about when I hear the word death.

-Marquis

From The Beat: Nothing but scary thoughts when you hear that word. But the one thing that death does is make everybody think about their own lives. If someone close to you dies, you start thinking about your own life, and what it means. You're right nobody deserves death, but death is part of nature and how we deal with it is gonna build our character.

Life

L is for the loved ones I lost
I is for the imprisonment my mind has to suffer
F is for the fake as people I have to deal with
E is for eternally cause that's the only life I'm livin

-Makayla

From The Beat: L is for the loss you sustained, I is for the insight you gained, F is for the future we hope you create, where E is everyone you shared your love with, to fight hate.

Too Many People Want To Kill Me

This life I'm living you got to have heart
Broad daylight shooting, never kill in the dark
If you look at a real ninja like me you might
Want to get on my hype
Sometimes I just look straight through you
And I can tell you ain't bright
How you gon' kill me if you ain't got nothing
Everybody want to hate and they always fronting
You are always saying you active let me see something
People always acting like they hot but ain't pushing no white
Like chock on the block
I swear to god you boys be harder then cotton
And ya'll aint nothing like me you probably smoke coke
But you can't smoke me, know that.
Rest in peace Ant.

-Lil' Dirt

From The Beat: Why do you feel like so many people are trying to kill you? And why are you inviting them to a challenge? Do you actually think that the people who want to kill you don't have anything? Why you keep talking like you got an invisible shield protecting you? Do you think you're invincible? Maybe you should look at life a little different! Life is precious, we don't wanna see one of your homies writing a RIP piece about you.

Death

I mean I seen death and I don't really like to talk about it you feel me? I had a lot of friends that passed and actually seen one of my friends get busted. Shhh ain't cool, that shhh real on my mama. I don't speak on it though you feel that? Shh hurt to see one of your friends get smoked. I lost too many ninjas but I can't do shhh 'cause if I do go out lookin' for the ninjas and get 'em you feel me? That's gone make me feel good but that ain't gon' bring 'em back that's why I'm doin' hella shh, but yeah, I stay holdin my ninjas down on some real shhh.

REST IN PEACE Doody, Scoot, Leon, Chavo, Ron-Ron, Willie, Jetam, Dad.

- Thinking

From The Beat: You know nobody wins a war. You can kill thirty enemies and only lose 15 of your friends, but in the end your fifteen friends are not coming back no matter how much you keep killing. So the cycle of death keeps repeating itself over and over. Why is there so much killing? What's your plan?

Death Of A Friend

When I hear the word death all I think about is my lil bra Mikal. I miss my ninja so bad I couldn't believe when my girl called me and told me he had died. I just grabbed his stunnas he had left at my house and cried. That was my dog and I just was with him the same night but when I left he told me the last words we ever spoke, which was what time it was 12:08 am, and he got hit a 2:35 am and was pronounced dead at 5:30am.

I was told in the afternoon July 14th, 2006 the worst day of my life I lost my brother, my best friend, shhh I lost my dawg. I miss my ninja but I know he lookin' down on me. So I'm a hold it down for my bra. I love that ninja. RIP MIKAL AMEER ROBINSON 1-26-91 to 7-14-06

-Juice

From The Beat: We're sorry to hear about your best friend. Our heart and prayers go out to you and his family. How do you keep his memory alive? What did you learn about life from death of your best friend?

Life

If I had the chance to change I would because this life that I live now is not the life that I'd want my son to have to grow up. Knowing that his father is a F-up. So I would want to change some of the things I do because I didn't do nothing but get me locked up, sent to placement, and back here.

So if I wanted to succeed in life I would have to finish the 12th grade, get a good and legal job and stay positive. I don't know why it took me seventeen and a half years to realize all these things, but I'm somewhat glad that I learned some things and is willing to use these steps to help me succeed in life. It's not only for my family that I want to change, but for me too. So when I get out of here I will start to work on my goal for the future(peace).

- Young Father

From The Beat: You know what sometimes it takes someone to make mistakes and learn from them in order to grow up. You made your mistakes, now learn from them. Sometimes you gotta experience it firsthand to realize that the lifestyle you were leading ain't for you and that you need to make a change. Set your goals and aim high. Don't let nothing stop you.

The Pain Of Death

Death is a painful thing for every single person in the world.
No one can say that it ain't painful.
Death destroys families' lives.
It destroys a lot of things.
I was on the border of losing my life
in a car accident and another is when I had my surgery,
the doctor said if I had not got there on time,
an hour later, I would be death.
For a mother or a father it's painful to lose one of their children
or to a grandma,
that's all I got for this topic
death is not a joke.

-Marco

From The Beat: Death is very painful. But as painful as it seems, sometimes you just have to look at the positive side. Without death some people wouldn't value life at all. For some people it takes a relative, best friend, or someone close to them to die for them to actually realize how precious life is.

I'm somewhat glad that I learned some things and is willing to use these steps to help me succeed in life.

Death RIP Mikal

Damn, I can't believe you gone. I miss you so much.

You was like a brotha. Fahgit that, you are my bra and you will always be a part of me. Even though you not here, you still young but so so solid.

I love you lil' bra. You're gone but never forgotten. Love, yo' big sis.

-Makayla

From The Beat: Keep his memory alive in your songs, your poems, and mostly your deeds. Let them be deeds that bring more light into the darkness you've felt.

Tattoos

The topic I am going to write on is, what's a tattoo representing life or death wait I got a couple.

I gang bang, and I got some really close friends that I lost to gangs so I got his name tattooed on my chest.

I also got the tat that reps where I am from, even though it could get me killed.

But that is something I got to live with But to all that have people that passed away to life of gang banging RIP.

They are gone, but never forgotten. But that's all I got for this week .I am out

-Shorty

From The Beat: It's frightening to think you have put a mark on yourself that you could get killed for. When we look back on history, it seems like you're not free, even when you're out of jail: in Ancient Greece and Rome, and in America even 200 years ago, slaves used to be branded with marks that identified where they were from. Fifty years ago, Jews had numbers tattooed on their arms when they were put in prison camps by the Nazis. And now, young people are doing the same things to themselves. Is that freedom, or a new kind of mental slavery?

Dead Homies

Man, in the last three years I've done lost like four homies. Matter of fact, my big homie Sky second anniversary is coming up on Nov 23. I miss dude for real for real. When I seen his body in the box, I broke down. I wouldn't think he would be the first to go, but shhh happens.

Then my big homie Ant Thizzle, he got killed two months before Sky got killed, like in September. I didn't even go to this funeral. I don't know, that death really didn't hit me like Sky and my ninja Chedda. They said Thizz got shot once, like in the leg, and he died 'cause he had something wrong with his blood.

Then my brah Chedda got hit. Ahhh, man, I lost it! Couldn't eat, sleep, I didn't care about shhh. After he got killed, I didn't care about shhh. After he got killed, I didn't care about living no more. I wanted to through all those cats that associate with that cat that killed my brah, a blanket party. But it's coo'. They know what goes around comes around.

And then I lost a OG homie in the begin of this year. He got shot in the stomach, and he was so big that he didn't even feel the shot. He was driving and next thing you knew, his adrenaline rush kicked in, and he crashed into a bus stop.

I'm going to miss them. But yeah, I just wanted to say we holding it down for them.

-Money Earnin Vernon

From The Beat: You have experienced far too much death, unless you're 80 years old. How many "soldiers" do you have to lose before you begin to think about what you can do alive that you can't do dead... We bet that every one of your homies whom you memorialize in this piece would exchange places with you if they could. And don't forget your own words when you consider your next steps: "...what goes around comes around."

Death

When I was a young ninja, I saw ma cousin get killed by a police officer. Dat shhh ain't coo'. He got ht in da head three times and da chest two times. I was about nine years old when dis happened, and the rest of dat day felt hella dull and weak. Ever since he died, it haven't been da same.

-Coo' B

From The Beat: We're sorry that this happened to your cousin, and sorry that you witnessed this tragedy. Was it an "accident," or were the police shooting at your cousin? How old was he?

RIP Sir Marcus

I thought ita never happen —
A young thug catchin' feelings
But it happen to everybody
Especially the realest
Instead of hoping for good shhh
I expect the worst
It's goin' down in them streets
So is being locked up a gift or a curse?
To stop from doin' things the wrong way
I do it in reverse.
Man, I'm real lucky not to had gotten hit.
But what happened to my cousin,
That some messed up shhh.
I wish it never happened
And that come from the heart.
But now my heart's filled with pain
And only memories that remain
So, when I make it where I be
Believe I'ma make it rain!
It's really not a game.

-Fed-up beam

From The Beat: We had to remove the last few lines of your poem because those threats are not Beat appropriate. We're sorry about your cousin. We wish it never happened, too, and it's tragic how often we have to make that wish!

Death Prayer

When I hear the word death I think about how my death is going to come. I pray I don't die by the gun. I seen too many people get killed by it.

-Fed-Up Beam

From The Beat: This is a prayer we hope God answers. But you have something to do with making it come true, too.

Gone But Neva Forgotten

What's good wit' The Beat? Me, Young A.N.T.O., same o' same o'.

But I'm writing in dedication to the big homie "Bean". I writing about big bra because when I was growing up a young buck. Bra put me on when I

first jumped off the porch. He used to tell me don't get in this shhh. But it went in one ear and out the other.

It was time's when he gave me good influences.

But just being a hardheaded young Y.G., I'm like, forget it. Death gone come one day regardless... so forget the world.

RIP Bean. Gone but never forgotten.

-Anto

From The Beat: Children don't learn by the lessons they're told, but by the lessons they see. Death will come soon enough, so why not prolong it as long as possible?

My Grandfather's Death Still Hurts

When I hear the word death, it saddens me because the first thing that comes to my mind is my grandfather who I considered my only family member. The reason for that is because I didn't and still don't get along with my family.

My grandfather died seven years ago, and I'm still grieving over. I think that's the reason for my severe depression. I told myself that was going to be the last funeral I go to. I've witnessed four deaths and nine attempted murders.

When I lose someone close, which so far has been my grandfather, it hurts. But as for strangers, they should have known their time was go come because most murders are from a person breaking a street rule which you should already know have bad consequences.

Whenever I get out the halls, I'ma get a tattoo that would be RIP Oscar W. inside a cross.

-Sabrina

From The Beat: We're sorry you lost your grandfather, but we're glad you had such a special person in your life. What do you think he would want for you? And what do you think he would want from you?

My Tattoo

Da reason I got my tattoo was because of death. But really it wasn't about death. It was about celebrating the life of my grandma. And when I say celebrating my grandma's life, I mean her life on earth and her new life in heaven.

See, most people get RIP meaning Rest In Peace. But my RIP stands for Rest In Paradise. My tattoo is a big-ass cross that says R.I.P Grandma. Shhh! Just writing about it makes me think about her. Shhh! If it wasn't for her, I wouldn't even be here. So I wanna thanks to ma grandma. Love you. Rest In Paradise.

-Young Thizz

From The Beat: Even though we're sorry your grandma passed, you were so lucky to have her in your life! Of course she knows how much you miss and love her. And of course you know how much she wants you to do good.

Can't Leave The Streets Alone

What's up Beat? Me? Shhh, I'm jus' chillin', waitin' to see where they gonna send ya boy from here. But for today topic, instead of jus' writin', I wrote a rap:

[Some of my ninjas dead, but most of 'em still here
Only God know if they gon' make it through these years.]
[But you neva know, that one ninja might be me
My momma wake up cryin' to see her son on TV]
[Probably most wanted or probably murdered las' night
But if I die, best believe my ninjas on a hype.]
[And if don't, then I'ma be turnin' in my suckin' casket
I shoulda listened; Unc' said stop messin' wit'them bastards.]
[All yo' ninjas ain't to be trusted is what he told me
Just 'cause y'all from the same 'hood don't mean that ninja yo' homie.]
[So if I ain't wit' it, well then I'm on my own
The two realist ninjas I know is Digga and T-Rohe.]
[He said I will see for myself, ninja jus' keep it on
And watch most of ninjas turn sucka when the beef is on.]
[It's a hard life I'm livin' so I keep the chrome
I know I'm gonna die one day 'cause I can't leave the streets alone.]

-Boog Swella

From The Beat: How much are you willing to risk for the street life you love? We can see that you've accepted the possibility of death. But what about the possibility of paralysis where you have to depend on someone else for everything? Or, the possibility that one of these times it will be years, and then more years behind bars in the company of other men? Have you really thought through all the possible consequences?

Almost Death

What's up Beat? This Lil' Bra, and I want to let you know that four years ago I was selling dope. Some ninjas tried to jump me. But I stay with a cannon so I bust at them and they bust back. I got hit in my leg and my shoulder. And by me selling dope could've led me to death.

-Lil Bra

From The Beat: Even if you didn't die, you could have killed someone else and paid the price of life-long enslavement! It's not just selling dope that put your life in danger, it's also that cannon you stay with.

Rest In Paradise

Man, just thinkin' about losing my big cousin. It just can't be true. A few days before it happened, I was on the phone with him. I remember telling him what I went down for. He told me, " I'm always goin' for that fast money." I said, " I know "

That made me think about me getting paid for going to school. I felt real stupid for doin' that dumb shhh. I remember the days we used to just hop in the Caddy and match hella blunts, stunning on ninjas like always, on every female if movin' if she worth us lookin'

Man, I'ma miss sneakin' in his bucket to take it out somthin' vicious. Man, it's messed up all the homies in jail right now and we ain't gone be able to see him one last time. But they can't hold us down forever.

-Fed-Up Beam

From The Beat: It's terrible that you have lost your big cousin, and it's terrible that so many have lost so many! We can understand why you miss the life you left behind, but we're tired of rewinding so many of you that they CAN hold you down if you give them the opportunity. So, why not tell us what it means to you when you wrote those words, "they can't hold us down forever."

Trust

People that don't trust in other people, those
who dishonor other guys
Shall somebody see what I see in the skies,
What I do is what I do, all I can do is ask God why
It's a lot of stuff that God wants me to do, that I should abide
By the female that I so called "love" will understand why

-Sauce

From The Beat: We'd love for you to write some of the things you think God wants for and from you, and what you're planning to do about it.

When Death Comes To Mind

When death comes to mind I think about a lot. First I always wonder if somebody dies, is somebody born at the same time. Then I wonder if it is necessary for people to die. They say it helps keep the population. But that's some BS.

Death brings pain, hurt, etc. I think of all the families that have lost loved ones. How they handle death. I know when I lost a family, homies, I think of how it brought darkness to me and those around me. I think about how I will never be with them again, how I will never talk with them. You could talk with them in private, but you would never be with them. Every time they birthday or the day the past comes up, you will mourn and also celebrate their life. But never with them.

Then when I think about death, I think violence. I think about all the things that are going on in the world. The millions of people that lose their lives over war, peace, power, money, family, government etc.

I have to think more on this topic, but I will write more later. I got to think. My mind is on others things.

-GoldM

From The Beat: Why do you think death as population control is BS? Do you think the earth can sustain any number of people? We love how you take writing and our topics seriously, even when you still need time to think the subject through. Maybe you should have written about what was on your mind at the time...

Death

Death is something people no longer fear. Rather, it's of old age or 'cause someone took their life. Death is not something we can ont run bnt can speed np. It can be easy and painless or hard and painful. But when I see death, I see blood, 'cause most death in 2007 are either gnn deaths, stabbings or accidents.

-Winston

From The Beat: The most tragic thing about what you've written is that it is true in some areas, but not true in others. Overall, most deaths in 2007 (and every other year) are due to natural causes: heart failure, cancer, AIDS, etc.) But in certain areas of every city in America, there are wars on the streets taking the lives of young men of color. Does it have to be this way?

Trusting

It's at the point where he don't trust nobody. Forget everybody — friends, family and foes. He's a one man army with multiple weapons, guns, knives, bombs. I'm fighting a war that I can't win. It's the world against me, and that guy is me.

-J-Pop

From The Beat: If you're fighting a war that you can't win, then it sounds like it's time to stop fighting. Did you ever see the movie "War Games"? The computer looked at every possible outcome of atomic war, and concluded that the only way to win was not to play.

Death

What's good Beat? It's Meezy the Great, an' I'm np in nnit 7 doin' what I do. Bnt I'ma tella about death.

Man, I ain't never really tripped off dyin' 'cause it just happen. I mean I know some people who died an' it hit me, bnt not that bad. I mean, I was like, "Damn! That's ma ninja an' I'm never gone see him again. Rest in Paradise."

-Meezy The Great

From the Beat: You say dying just happens, as if there's nothing you can do to speed or slow the process. Is that what you really believe, that your time comes whenever it comes, and there's nothing you can do to protect yourself in a way that gives you a longer life?

Rip Big Brother

What's np, Beat? Me, happy as hell! I jnst fonnd ont today I'm goin' home in a few days. Well, I'm here to pay my respect to all the loved ones that have passed. A death that affected me and my life was the death of my older brother.

My older brother died on June 22, 2007. He drowned in a river in Modesto. I was with him like an hour before he died. He patted me on my shoulders and told me he loved me and he'd see me the next week. An hour and a half later I fonnd ont his body is somewhere in a river not to be fonnd til the next day.

Ever since his death, my life been different. I'm startin' to pick myself back np, bnt I'm never gonna forget my big brother.

RIP Naaim, 7/14/82 – 6/22/07.

-Muslim Warrior

From The Beat: Damn! All we can say is that, at least, you had that last experience with him — and he was the kind of wonnerful brother who expressed his love out loud. We're sorry for your loss, but happy that time is allowing you to start healing.

Just A Matter Of Time

When I think of death, I think of beef. The reason I think of that is because that's what comes ont it. Even though I know the ontcome of it, it won't stop for me because I did too many things to others and others did too many things to me.

My ninjas got killed by the people that I'm beefing with today, an' I love my ninjas. If pnsh comes to shove, I take slugs for my ninjas. And the reason why is because some took slngs for me.

I know it's just a matter of time before I get killed or I kill... ride it ont from my cell in da pen.

-Poon.G

From The Beat: Here's one of our problems with your reasoning: it doesn't allow for the possibility of a change of heart somewhere down the road. Of course, it's tempting to think you [or we] will never change, but that's like making ourselves into gods who know the future. The truth is, change is possible in every one of our lives. But if you put yourself in prison for life and the change occurs afterwards, you would not be able to act on it. We know you think you will always believe as you do this minute, but we're old enough to know that isn't true. Wait and see.

A Tattoo

If I get a tat representing life or death, I would get death because every step I take everywhere I go I'm willing to risk ma life for what I represent. It be the devil grabbing the heart.

-Yung Casper

From The Beat: Risk your life for what you represent means that what you represent is worth more than you are. That means that the creation of men and women [the cause you represent] is greater than the creation of God, which is you.

Rest In Paradise

What's np Beat? Dis ya boy Keith, AKA K-B. Mane, I jnst wanna say RIP to Lil' Neesh. Mane, it was like yesterday me and her was at middle school together and now she gone. When I heard that, I was hella mad, bnt I couldn't do nothing because I was in jail. Mane, I miss her hella much. RIP Lil' Neesh.

-K-B

From The Beat: We took out the implied threat in the last line. But we wonder how carrying out such threats would do anything for anyone.

Fo' The Dead Homies

What's np Beat? This yo' boi Peannt. Fo' real, dough, I wanta say something 'bout the dead homies. I miss my ninjas dough. I grew np wit' all mah dead homies. They died at a young age. Even though some of them was 20, shhh, they was still yonng.

But when mah ninja Nee Nee got killed, I jnst went off on every cat that was in their crew. I dedicate this to mah dead homies. Rest in peace. I'm ont.

-Peannt

From The Beat: Hell yes, 20 is still young — way too young to die! We don't know how to stop this senseless killing, but we know that going off on them just means they'll go off on you, and back and forth until there's nothing but mothers' tears.

RIP Auntie Gina

I really miss my auntie. My auntie died of cancer. My auntie was really healthy. I just still don't understand why she had to go.

It's hard for me to get over my auntie's death. I wish she was still alive because everyone misses our auntie. My auntie Gina was the bone that was keeping the family together. I really miss her so much, but now she's gone and I need to know that she's upstairs with God.

I know now that my auntie Gina is with the angels. I bet she watching my every move. That's why I'm not worried or sad that she's gone. I'm kinda glad she's in heaven now because I can look up an' see the beautiful sky an knowing that she's up there. That makes me feel so good. I'm not sad and crying no more.

Auntie Gina was a comedian. She used to make the whole family laugh at funny jokes. An' every time the family argued, when Auntie Gina found out, she went off on the whole family. My mother an' I used to just look at each other and just bust out an laugh. But Auntie Gina was so serious about our family sticking together as on big family.

Auntie Gina was my favorite auntie in the whole world. I miss Auntie Gina so much. I wish it was something I could have done to keep her alive. I'm glad I seen her before she passed.

-Brittania, San Francisco

From The Beat: We don't usually give RIPs a Piece Of the Week even when they are as well written as this, but we learned so much about your Aunt Gina and her role in your family that you deserve it. We are so sorry that you lost this wonderful person, but like you said, you can comfort yourself with the knowledge that she is in Heaven. So don't forget that she is watching your every move, and make her even more proud of you than she already was.

Terrible Times

Terrible times and I wonder why. Why do the shhh happen to me? Life has its up and downs, but it's always down in my town. So many death. RIP all the homies.

If they ain't killin' us, they lockin' us up. But why they tried everything to get me for a warrant? Come in here, hear about homies getting' killed every time with the terrible times.

-Queela

From The Beat: So you really think life is especially hard on you? We know you have it bad, but aren't there people worse off than you? You can ask why they tried so hard to get you just for a warrant, but then we can ask why would you risk so much just for a warrant?

RIP Big Bruh

Man, when I tell you it's hard to let somebody go. Sept. 18, '05 it was all bad. I wish it had been a dream. Like damn, why God had to take him?

When I got that call, I just wish they could've took me with him. It was like they took my best friend! At the funeral it went down. The town was crackin'. We sent Tae home with a bash. I know he lookin' down on me like, "She in the halls writing in The Beat."

I love you brother. Your gone but never forgotten! Your lil' sis.

RIP Donte Wilson, 12/22/86-9/18/'05.

-Nee Nee

From The Beat: And its especially hard to let someone go when he is still a teenager! If Donte is looking down on you, that means has among angles. And if he's among angels, what do you think he wants to see you do as he looks down?

SANTA CLARA COUNTY

Death

I think going to a friend's death is messed up and it hurts a lot to see your best friend die. It's not right.

I know that when someone dies it's a sad thing and you sometimes wish you can die too because it hurts you a lot when someone you know dies, someone you love, you care for. That's like a dream ... it's like you have a full heart and when it's gone, it kills you. It's like you are not alive anymore. It's like you are not there no more. You want more when your friend dies. You want him back. But it won't happen because he's gone. He's gone and there's no coming back and it hurts cause you want him back.

-Unknown Pain

From The Beat: It seems like you know about this pain and these emotions because you have gone through it. When death takes away someone we loved, it is really hard because we are left wondering why we are good enough to live if our friend was taken and where they are now. Thank you for sharing these feelings.

Some deaths I've seen make me feel suicidal...

Never Going To Stop

Ever seen Death in the eyes of a gangsta?
'Caused by guns knives and youngstas with funk
the life I live ain't no joke for a pranksta I seen
different fools bustin' and others run

Nine years old I saw my first dead body
seven years later still bangin like a "G"
I seen that first dead fo'o like he wasn't nobody,
years later I still see him in my dreams

Gangstas seen shhh that a fool wouldn't believe
I've seen death from gunshots and overdoses
Blood being spilt everyday on these streets
Every death and life live in a life that were chosen

Some deaths I've seen make me feel suicidal
But I stay on my toes wit' my heart in the game
Lock me up thinking I'm gonna stop but I'm idle
I can't stop I'm destined for the fame!

-Adrian

From The Beat: You said you can't stop won't stop cause you headed to fame/ death and jail are the only two outcomes to this game/ the path you headed can guarantee you more pain/ so much blood spilled in these streets, the sidewalks are stained/ So think about your life and the way that you wanna live/ Cause you can lose it to the streets or go to jail for life, still being a kid/

Dark

When I think of death I think of a very dark and peaceful place.
A place where you wont be worrying about what you're going to do.
You're just waiting for judgment hour.
When God pulls you up and tells you where you're going to be, heaven or hell.
I have never witnessed somebody being shot or killed, and I don't think I ever want to.
I've gone to one funeral, and didn't really like it.
I had so many emotions building up in me I didn't know how to deal with it.
And I didn't believe it at first, but slowly I started feeling a little bit better.
I don't feel completely normal. Anyways I'm out.

-Michael

From The Beat: Everyone has their own perception of death, but one thing we know for sure is that we aint coming back after that. And another thing, death is something very tragic to everybody. It's all right to get emotional but don't keep your feelings trapped. Why don't you feel normal?

A Deadly Death

I saw my cousin get hit by a train he died on impact. Actually I didn't believe he was dead, until his wake and I saw him in the coffin with all that make up on his face and arm covering the bruises and missing skin, it's weird, when I was looking at my cousins chest in the coffin expecting it to move up and down like if he was breathing.

-Miss My Cousin

From The Beat: Sorry to hear about your cousin. Death can be such a surreal thing, right? Human beings are actually such delicate creatures, vulnerable to death and vulnerable to the sorrow that death can bring.

Beat Within

What up with it Beat? This gots to be a big ass Man Stro, just want to say G-vole, as I'm down for five more months. Time is flying by but, for now, I have chosen the topic "Death."

Death is some gotcho shhh You feel? But it is more gotcho when it happens in front of you. I come from the streets of San Jose, and – in my town – people die almost every day.

Well, let me tell you, on June 9th, 2005, me and the carnals were at the park, kicking it like every day, drinking and smoking. Then, out the cuts, a rival gang member pulls up at the corner and approaches us from a distance. We stay packing but he got one by himself. We were on the other side when it happened, but – as you know – what happened was another fallen soldier.

Rest In Peace Miko, in loving memory. It was hard going through it, but everybody's going to die – so might as well live it to the fullest. Alrato Beat.

-Man Stro

From The Beat: Even though you talk about this like its nothing, it must have been a really scary and sad day for you. It must be so hard to walk away from screething like this and not want to get revenge, but wouldn't it be a better way to honor your fallen friend than to allow another person to grow and change for the better. Is there a way to stop the violence?

My Beautiful Mother

I ain't get a tattoo yet, but when I do get one it will be of my mom's portrait on my heart or chest.

My mom died when I was 12, because her fiancé killed her. I'm gonna get it over my heart because to me, she represents life. She was and still is my life. Everything I did was for her and everything she did was for me.

I ain't the bragging type but she is beautiful. When people look at her, you don't quite see the outer beauty but the inner beauty is what sticks out the most. You can just tell what type of person she was without judging her. She represents my heartbeat.

I gained confidence and leadership from her by the way she presented herself and by the way she was outspoken. I gained pride and courage by the way she dealt with things and went through obstacles. I live the way I live because she made me like this.

I'm locked up right now though because of petty shhh, but other than that I know she would approve of how the way I grew up and the way I am.

-Alajujuan

From The Beat: It seems like you have taken all the positive things from your mother and honored them, which is the best way to remember her. You could dwell on the negative but it seems like you have risen above that. Thank you for sharing.

Death In many Forms

I have seen death in many forms. I've seen my boys dying in hospital beds and family members dying of old age and cancer.

But on the flip side I've seen death in the eyes of a person that is still living. You go downtown in the streets of San Jose and see any of the dope fiends' eyes you will know what I mean. But my ways of coping with death was always to hold in my feelings but never forget.

-Pac-Man

From The Beat: You're right death comes in many forms and it affects us all in all different kind of ways. We know what you're talking about when you look into the eyes of a drug abuser and you see the emptiness and hopelessness there. You don't always have to hold in your feelings. It's all right to let them out and express them in any way that might help you vent out. Whether it be writing, crying, you know but you can't keep your feelings all bottled up, cause you might explode!

Death Of My Friend

Well, when I hear the word 'dead' I remember about all my ninjas who passed away and that makes me mad, angry and violent. Like my homie Ganzo (RIP) – he was my best homie and we were close. We were like brothers and one day we were chilling in my hood, on the corner of the street and some enemies passed by and started shooting at us and my friend got shot in the head two times and he passed away. That's why I hate when I hear the word death, because it reminds me of my homie Ganzo. RIP Ganzo, with all my respect.

-Travisso

From The Beat: Seeing your friend killed in front of you sounds really, really scary and horrible. How have you processed and tried to move on from this moment? Perhaps writing about it more and thinking about it and trying to move on will help, screetiness just pushing feelings away is not the healthiest way to deal with things, even if it is the easiest.

Death Do My Shoulders

Once a little boy growing up in a world full of sin
At the time I never knew the world was coming to the end
Growing up was cool
I would go to school
Make an effort to do well
Then middle came along with hell.
I seen my boys being fools
Then followed their ways of ditching school
I got into a lot trouble
Did something bad again my punishment got doubled
My mom prayed to God I wouldn't get worse
The life I choose was leading to a hearse
As I got older my eyes opened up
Lil by lil I would fill up my cup
Filled it up with evilness and hate
Gave up things I should appreciate
Got into gangs into hood thangs living it with death on my shoulder
Evil and good fighting for me as I got older
Meet the thugs sold the drugs wear the wrong color do what I was taught
These type of things I could get shot
One day out drunk as hell me and the home girls, Foolish and Sean
Just walking along seen the enemy
Deaths tryin' to get me
Called out his gang we going to bang back
Older cats didn't think it'll be like that
Homie got hit with a ranch, home girl yelling with consent
I was smashing so hard going down death's boulevard
Got stuck in the gut
Aww I wailed in pain
Death's gonna take me out the game
Momma your boys in trouble what a shame
Shoot Mr. G said "It's time next time I be faster late."

-Marvin

From The Beat: What you waiting for? For Death to come to you soon/ It can come early at breakfast or maybe in the afternoon/ It ain't gotta be dark for someone to want to kill/ Death comes at anytime of the day, and thats just keepin it real/ Cause the drama business ain't no joke, this game only gets colder/ In the end, you make the choice to live with death on your shoulder/

Death

Death means a lot to me because my Uncle Jr. died and he meant so much in my life. I looked up to him. He was a G like me, (lol) Naw, but he was a gangsta. He would smoke weed all day punk on rivals and he would pull licks and get g rides. He would do all these things all day everyday. He put his life on the line.

All of a sudden he had this girl they were gonna have a baby, then he started to change his life around.

My grandma, his mom, cried for him to stop the life he lead, 'cause she knew I was gonna take his spot as a G, now look at me.

So, when he found out his lady was three months pregnant he was stopping slowly. Then one day he wanted to see me and my brother play football at ANH football, and on his way home he got in a car crash. This white lady was drunk and smashed right into the car my grandma broke her arm, my aunt broke her arm and leg, and my uncle lost his life and most of all he lost the baby, but his lady lived.

That's when I changed my life, for sure. I was gang banging and everything. I started to get into drugs and hit my lady everyday. But now I want to stop the drugs and stop hitting my lady for the good of us because God made us to do it right here on earth. If I could I would stop what I do on the streets but I can't, as much as I want to.

-Miklonz

From The Beat: We are very sorry to hear about the loss to your uncle. We see that your "can't stop won't stop" mentality might take you to places you don't wanna be. For example, Jail, Penitentiaries, Mortuaries, more funerals. Also one thing you do need to stop for sure is STOP HITTING YOUR GIRL! Do whatever else you want, but don't hit her or blame her for all the messed up cards you been dealt. Man up! We don't think your uncle would be very proud of you right now, get up outta jail, stop using drugs and stop hitting your girl!

A Quick Thought On Death

I don't think that I would ever die for anyone but me. That's all Beat.

-Moriah

From The Beat: We believe thats what you think now. Its possible that the future may deliver a surprise or two or three. We believe its possible that you may change your mind about this.

Death Is The Creeps

What's up Beat? It's me your homie Marco like always about the topic.

Today topic is death when I hear the word death I get the creeps. I just remember the people that died. I just can't handle it sometimes.

I will like to pay some respects to my homie that passed away. Carlos Montoya rest in peace homie. Sorry if I didn't go to your funeral. I didn't have the bravery to go see you right there in the coffin. I just want you to remember you just they way you where so rest in peace homey. Will that's what I feel about death. Well gots to cut this short late.

-Marco

From The Beat: We all know death is a sensitive issue. We all have to deal with it, whether it be our loved ones, homies, relatives, ect. Its hard when some one we're close to passes away? How did you deal with your homies death? What can you do to honor his memory?

Almost Killed

Hey G-vo Beat? It's this homeboy Troubles from Gilroy coming at you from the max unit. But on tonight topic about death, well, I was recently almost killed. I just ran from YA alternative and, well, I was out I got caught slippin' by some rivals. Me and my homeboy got jumped. My homeboy is on life support right now and I got stabbed five times. I got stabbed on my head, on my back, on my face, and on the back of my arm. But anyways I'm running short on words so till next time this abstract minded homeboy is out.

-Troubles

From The Beat: Can you please tell us what an "abstract minded homeboy" is? As to your near-death experience, it would be enough for us to change our act. Is it enough for you? Your homeboy is on life support, but that could just as easily have been you. Is it worth losing everything? Is it worth spending the remaining 60 years of your life on life support?

Tattoo

If I was to get a tattoo, I would get these two words along with two pictures on my back. On the left side of my back I would get the word "before". That would represent the life I'm living right now. I would get my hands put in handcuffs holding a bar.

On the right side I would get the word "after". I would get "after" because I know someday I'll live a better life. The picture that would represent it would be money. That is a tattoo that I would get later on in the future.

-Before And After

From The Beat: *Sounds like an interesting tattoo. Why would you put money on the "after" side of your back? How would the money symbolize a better life? Do you think money equals better life? Is that how you measure success? You can start off by staying out of the system, and your life will improve drastically.*

Death And Life

I think that life is wonderful. But at the same time and be horrifying. It's all a matter in your hands.

Life is short and never promised so as you live your life, you need to make the best of it and accomplish the things that'll make you feel good and y'all parents too.

Death is promised to you and me, but life after death is something that's unknown to me. I am not sure if I'm going to see those pearly gates or those flames. But what I do know is that you only have one chance to live that good life so don't let nobody take that time that most precious away from you.

-Lil' D

From The Beat: *Life is wonderful we have to agree with you on that. And it can be horrifying. Life is whatever we make out of it. We can do what we want to do. Just know that whatever we do, whether it be good or bad, there's always gonna be consequences, actions and results. If we decide to live negatively then we might be surrounded by negativity all the time. But if we try to do good, then positive things will come.*

Death By Fear

It was a Halloween night I was hanging out
with four of my friends.
Chilling having fun, telling jokes, and playing truth or dare.
One dared another to go through the cemetery that we walk passed.
He said no 'cause he was scared
The girl comes and says man I'll do it
The man who didn't want to go said how will
We know you did or didn't go to the middle.
She says I'll stab this knife in the middle of the grass.]
They said okay.
She goes. Everything was quiet. We waited thirty seconds.
Then we heard a scream.
She never returned
We all went to see what happened
Flashing lights everywhere until we saw my friend
On the ground. Quiet. Didn't move, not breathing.
That's when I learned about Death.
Death by fear.

-Scary Nights

From The Beat: *Is this story fake or real? You can be scared to death maybe by a possible heart attack or panic attack? What a story you put down!*

Death

It's Destiny once again, from Gilroy. Well, before I get started I wanna say I miss my man, and "The Beat hasn't put none of my writings in".

Well – death - there's this one death I'll never forget. It's when my home boy Goofy passed away. Man, he's hella cool, people from San Francisco. He was my down home boy and the way he died was by a rival gang member. Man, my life changed a lot. I missed him. He used to come to Gilroy a lot, pick me up and yeah, go chill. Can't believe he's gone.

Well, I dealt with it by just keeping the memory close. That's all I wanna say for tonight Beat. R.I.P. Goofy.

-Destiny

From The Beat: *Goofy didn't pass away. If he died the way you say he died, he was murdered by rival gang members. And you can be sure that the rival gang members have mothers and fathers and sisters and brothers and friends who cry for them when they are murdered. What's with this crazy business of poor young people killing each other? The real enemy is poverty and the injustice that allows poverty to exist in such a rich country. Call a truce. Get together and figure out what the real enemy is. We need to stop killing each other.*

Never Seen Death

Death! I never had seen anyone die before.

I've had a good friend pass away before. It was very sad to hear that he was murdered. He was at a gas station in San Jose. He was wearing all gang colors, when a car pulled up, filled with the enemy. As my friend was pumping gas one of them shot him in the head right in from of his wife and kid. The shooters fled the scene. I'm not sure if they were caught.

I wanted to pay my respect by going to the funeral but I didn't know where it was. I just want to say God bless to my homie Rob and RIP. It's a sad thing to lose someone you once knew. He was a good friend. He's in a better place now. Peace out.

-Vinny, Vin, Vin, Vinny

From The Beat: *That's a very sad story to hear. Our prayers go out to your friend and his family. We hope that you don't have to experience this kind of loss again. But you know when you lead that certain lifestyle you already know what to expect. Jail and death comes along with the gangbanging game.*

Death Is Another Life

Death to me is just another life after this one on earth. I never really thought about it, but now that I really think back I can say that I'm not afraid of dying but I'm afraid of losing someone close to me like my parents, brothers, sisters, or my best friend Bernadette or even my god daughter Isabella.

To be honest I don't know what I would do if something like that would happen, and at the same time I don't want to die before they do 'cause I don't want to put them through the pain of losing someone close.

Well that's all I have for today R.I.P Speedy. And to all, stay up and stay solid.

-Lil' Changa

From The Beat: *It feels like you began to think about death as you were writing these words, that ideas you hadn't considered began to surface during the writing of your piece. That's actually pretty much how all writers work. But this is a huge topic. If new ideas come to you, please share them with us in a later issue of The Beat.*

A Good Day

Q-vole Beat. It's this vato once again just dropping some linias. Well, a moment in my vida that I won't forget is my B-day. I won't forget it because it was the day I got jumped in my barrio. It was a good day. Ever since then, I been through a lot. I seen vatos die to seeing vatos get shot or get stabbed, and that just makes me stronger and deeper in this vida.

My barrio is my family. They taught me how to survive in this crazy life of mine always taking care of me. When I didn't have a place to stay, they let me stay in their canto and I did the same for them. Well Beat, this psycho minded sunto is gone. Alrato

-Lil' Psycho

From The Beat: We can understand why getting jumped into a gang that provides you with comfort, shelter and street education could help you survive. But, at the same time, you wrote that ever since that day, you've seen violence, death and near death, which sounds like a bad trade to us. What are we missing?

In My Room

My I'm living the life that's rough rugged and raw I try to maintain
Because these walls an these streets got me going insane
I see families going through hurt, love and pain
It's the daily routine of the world these days
It happens to the best of us but some lives get ruined at a young age
They turn to the streets so they could release the rage
That's build up inside them through out there days
Some lives get took for childish play
But some see death from drugs they take
Or maybe from the beating they receive each day
Beat I want to let you in on something I would hesitate
To try to help homies these days
But they're men of their choices that take place
I aint perfect I got problems that I have, do and create
We all have different lives just like what we eat, hear, and taste
Well is Peanutt with the game play all day everyday
Alrato homeboys love and respect.

-Peanutt

From The Beat: Life is rough/ Like trying to make $500 out of 5 bucks/ sometimes it's funny the way that trouble finds us/ Make poor decisions before you know it police behind us/ But it's up to us to try to stop living this struggle/ Cause even if your broke, you can always find a legitimate hustle/ Even though drugs, and childish play, are acts made in confusion/ Even if you have or create problems, you can always create solutions/

Tattoo Repping Life And Death

If I was going to get a tat to represent life or death I would get a tat of the stairway to heaven going all the way up my arm. At the top of my shoulder would be heaven gates. On my other fore arm I would get R.I.P to all my fallen but not forgotten family members and friends.

-Pac-Man

From The Beat: Sounds like a very creative tat. How did you come up with the idea?

Life/Death

Well what's cracking? It's that homeboy Gumbie from San Jose.

Well today I came across the topic life/death. To me I wouldn't change my life I would just change some things but I'm happy with the family God blessed me with. I just hope there's an after life and I still know who my family is. But right now I need to get back out there and spend time with my family because I'm always tripping off what's happening all I could do is pray. I only live one life so I gotta make the most because time waits for no man.

Well 'till next time Beat. Al right then and to my brothers I love you bro keep your head up we'll kick it again sometime.

-Gumbie

From The Beat: You do need to go home and spend time with your family. You also need to go home and not come back to Juvenile hall, or county jail, or the state pen. That way you never have to be away from your family again. And you can kick it with your brothers whenever you want.

Death Understands Us

Wherever death may surprise us, it will be embraced,
Be it that it understands our way of life, and that our names won't be erased,
Let them stand when we've gone, even if some say we lived wrong
Let our presence be felt in the streets, and not just in a song,
Forgive us for our sins,
Let my brothers be more than a memory, please provide that their spirits be seen
And let it be known in hell and heaven, we've seen death in the greens.

-Shotgun

From The Beat: You write about what you want heaven and hell to know about you and those that have fallen. So, we're interested to know what you imagine heaven or hell to be.

Near Death

I remember this one time I was close to being killed one night. It was this one night me and two others of my boys with our three ladies were walking to a liquor store near Tapioca when these other guys caught us slipping, ran out of their cars with like more than a dozen heads and rush us. The first guy tried to hit me with a glass bottle but failed 'cause I blocked it.

Well, lets make this short. I got beat up pretty bad. After they jumped us, they shot me and my boys. The first thing I did when I got up was look around for my other two boys 'cause I was worried about them. It was the only thing on my mind at that time.

A'ight Beat, I'm out of time. Lates. Love all you ninjas.

-Viet Ox

From The Beat: This is a scary experience. When you think about how much worse it could have been, does it make you want to do anything differently? How many chances do you think you get in life?

Life... Death

life after death should be great
but no one knows my fate
life after death should be great
at least one chance to mate
what if you died and you were late
life after death should be great

-Gilbert

From The Beat: How and then a piece or a poem comes along that defies our ability to comment upon it. Yourz iz zuch a peem, Gilbert. You have the blood of a true poet in your veinz. We hope you rezognize your gift and develop it.

Life And Death Tattoo

If I could have any tattoo I wanted representing life and death it would be the face of the Grim Reaper with his hands in a praying position in front of him. A rosary would be wrapped around them. On the inside of his eyes would be a "can't stop" in one and a "won't stop" in the other.

-Don't Fear The Reaper

From The Beat: Some poet zaid that the eyez are the gateway to the zoul. Iz that what you'd like permanently marked at the gateway to your zoul – can't stop, won't ztop? Ever ask yourzelf why you can't ztop? Ever ask why you wouldn't want to ztop? Seemz to uz that that philozophy always leadz back to incarneration. Iz that what you really want?

Life

If I was able to choose the life I wanted, what would I choose? I would choose a good life. I would want to have a good mom who didn't do meth. I would know my real dad.

I would be in a good home, not a dope house. I would not have to move out at the age of a young teen, because my mom's boyfriends like to give me meth and beat me and my mom up.

-S

From The Beat: Your mom nebdz help, and zo do you. You didn't choose to be put in jeopardy. But now you must zhoose a zafer, healthier peth. Conzider how you might find zome help for your mom, too. Ask a counselor for advice, or ask an adult who has earnbd your trust for advize. Help iz out there, and you and your mom need it.

Tattoo Representing Either Life Or Death

Well, how's it going?

Check it out. I would get a cross on my back to represent life. And I would get skulls and a lot of crazy stuff to represent death. To my solid homies, my respects.

-Jordan

From The Beat: Jordan – we'd like you to zhare more of your thoughtz with uz. We have rezeivbd word that you're upzet that more of your piecez aren't appearing in The Beat. We promise you this: if you make a genuine effort to open up and tell uz your truest thoughtz, if you zhare with uz what it's really like to be Jordan, locked up in juvy, we'll print it. The Beat exiztz to share real ztoriez. Lots of people want to know what kidz in your zituation are going through, emotionally, zpiritually, physically. The Beat iz your opportunity to show the world what it meanz to be YOU. We really want to know.

Death

Death happens out of nowhere. No one can expect it. You can be here one day and gone the other. But it's just life, you know. You can't expect to live forever. Only few live that way. And that's from good health and a steady mind. Other than that, don't be afraid of death. We are taken from this earth for a reason, whether it be us doing wrong or good. There's a time when everyone's going to pass on to the next life.. So just live life and do what pleases you. And don't ever go on your knees. Go out on your feet.

-Trent

From The Beat: If you do whatever pleazez you, you might not have the zhoize of going out on your feet or your kneez. Healthy living involvez zelf control, which zometimez meanz zaying "no" to many thingz that might pleaze you, in the zhort run, but be harmful or deadly, in the long run. What kind of life do you want, Trent?

Death Around The Corner

I love life but I will live to die for the cause I believe in.
No one will ever break me.
I say life is nothing to abuse or take for granted.
But we only live once and should enjoy it.
Death is creeping up on us and one day we will fall into death's trap.
I do have the gangster mentality and I will strive to the end.
One day we will close our eyes and never open them again until we go to heaven.

-Andrew

From The Beat: What iz the cauze you believe in, Andrew? We'd really like to know what that iz. What doez it mean to "ztrive to the end"? Ztriva for what? Pleaze tell uz.

Tattoo Representing Life Or Death

I would get a cross with blood to represent death, and I would get "Life's A ... And Then You Die". I would do that because my brother has something like that. And I got it from a song by Mac Dre. That's my motto.

-Ernesto

From The Beat: We think your life could be much more than that. Aren't you the guy who alwayz zmilez? You zee things that others mizz. Get real Ernezto. Life iz not alwayz what you zay it is. Don't fall for cheap zloganz. Make up your own, based on what you zee, what you really know, down deep.

Fresh Start

Beat, if I could have a fresh start I would change everything in my life, except my whole family, because they are always there for me. I would not make the same choices as I did the first time. I would make my parents proud and not ashamed of me. But one thing you can change yourself, but you can't change your loved ones.

-Chino

From The Beat: Yez, you zan only zhange yourzelf, but you zan influence others. The truth of that liez within, too. Just think back about the many timez that otherz have influenced you, and not always for the bezt. Have good intentionz. Work hard. Your life will get better.

When I Die (a rap)

When I die I'm gonna die like a G
Layin' in a coffin with a grill in my teeth
When I die they gonna remember me
All the way from Burque all the way to Cali
When I die I'm gonna be lookin' fly
Gots to look good on my way to the sky
When I die don't even trip
Still do what you do, still stackin' the chips
When I die remember my name
It's that girl in Burque all ways rappin' the Bay
When I die jus never forget
I live my life to the fullest with no regret

-Akiah

From The Beat: G or no G,what good is lookin good when you are soul is resting in peace? Enjoy life while you are alive. Get back into school, get off probation and out of the system! Look good handling your business!

I Value My Mom And Her Life

If I could risk my life to save some one else it would be my mom's, because she's done so much for me so I can lead a good life. All I could do in return for what she has given me is cause more and more problems for her.

- Lil' R

From The Beat: It's good you would risk your life for your mother. The question is, what can you do for your mother to show her you are truly grateful for all she has done for you.

Life

The topic that I would choose is life, 'cause I would value my mom's life.

To some people or should I say most peoples life is worth a lot to them. People like to live life to the fullest, people like to have fun while they can, they like to make something of their lives.

- Richard

From The Beat: You should value your mother's life, after all she is the one who birthed you, and raised you to this point in your life. We as the Beat would like to hear in detail on how and why you value your mother's life. As well as what you can do to show her you are a changed person.

A Tragic Death

What is that like to witness first hand the tragic death of a close family member or a total stranger?

To tell you the truth I witnessed first hand the tragic death of a close friend. When I was in my freshman year I lost my best friend that I grew up with.

She was always telling me that her life was so messed up. She said she is tired of living her messed up life, and so on, she would tell me how things were pretty messed up in her household.

When I turned 15 it was my first year of being a freshman, one day my friend decided not to go to school. She hung herself in the closet in her room, when I heard that had happened to her I couldn't believe it. I didn't take it very good.

- Martha

From The Beat: Losing one this close to you can be devastating, almost to the point of wanting to give up. Know this, you are not alone, and most of all don't try and deal with something like this alone. Talk about it, let your feelings out, there are many in your community that are there to help you in your time of need.

Life And Death

I would risk my life to save my mom. I would do this because my mom has been there for me through thick and thin, through heaven and hell.

She has done everything to keep me safe, and has always made sure that nothing happens to me. She protects me like a guardian angel, and guides me through the rough times. She's always by my side and always down to back me up, 'cause I'm her baby girl for life. I'm always down to give up my life for her, any time.

Mom you're the beginning to every sentence, you're the beat to my heart, and the smile to my day and the path to my journey. I will be the one to take the last breath for you. I love you mom.

- Demitria

From The Beat: Well spoken, but there is one thing that stuck out. You stated that your mother will always be down to back you up. Its good you have a bond like one of the girls, but remember she is your mother first.

Death

When I die
Go ahead and cry
But do not weep forever
Try and enjoy life
I'm not sayin to forget me
But weep for me
Only for a day or two
I'm sayin don't let my death give you sorrow forever
'Cause when I'm gone
Let it be known you won't be alone
I look death in the face
'Cause I know I'll be in a wonderful place
So don't be afraid
'Cause I will always love you
Even when I leave you

- King Henry

From The Beat: Death is a hard thing for any one, and yes tears will be shed, and no, you will never be forgotten. For holidays and birthdays you will be remembered, as well as through out the years, and the tears for your love will flow with their loss.

My Death

Every time I close my eyes I see visions of me dying.
Try to think of something else,
but I see gravesites and people crying.
I guess you can say it's the way my life is lived.
Growing up to be a gangsta,
living life to me is a gift.
I'm thinking about the past and the stupid things I've done.
Like once getting locked up for three months
for doing a beer run.
The way I am will probably lead to my death.
I live my life to the fullest until the very last breathe.
I guess it's the end 'cause my life is over.
I was above the law, but now then the ground I'm lower.

- Lil' Convict

From The Beat: Many people see vision them self's dieing, in a day dream or at night, this is a natural thing. Many times it only means you are going through hard times, and that is how you see yourself. There is one thing for sure, your life is not over your life has just begun. Do your best to change your ways, so your dreams and visions don't come true.

Death is never ending. You can never wake up.

RIP To My Little Brother

I've had my little brother taken from me. When I was 13 my brother was brutally murdered then raped.

I've been having trouble with the law after that. I felt like nothing mattered anymore. I didn't care if I was locked up or dead. I just had this guilt like it was my fault so I took it out on myself and society.

But as I grew older, I knew that my brother, my guardian angel didn't want me locked up or dead. He wants me to live a full life and make something of myself.

I know now that he's always watching over me and he'll make sure I make it. That's what I'm going to do too. I'll be 18 in 6 months. So it all works out in the end.

Thank you little brother for believing in me. I won't let you or myself down I love and miss you so much. Tell we meet again in Heaven. Rest in Paradise

-Lil' Mainey, Alameda

From The Beat: We wish we could have known your little brother while he was alive, just so we could have seen how lucky he was to have a big brother like you to look up to. We never knew this about your past or your loss, we just knew you as a positive, thoughtful, struggling young man with great potential. Now another piece of the puzzle is there – and we know, because we know you, that the rest of your life can be a testament, not to the horror of his death, but the treasure of his life. Peace!

Tattoo

If I were to get a tattoo about life or death, I think the tattoo I would get would be of maybe a weight scale with the devil on one side and a angel on the other. It would represent to me the struggle of choosing right from wrong in my life. The devil would represent him pulling me in to make bad decisions. The angel can represent the good decisions he leads me to make.

It can relate back to life an' death because the devil would represent him pulling me into making the bad decisions which can lead me closer to death. For example, making the bad decision to affiliate with a gang and end up getting shot. Or to do drugs and end up doped out or overdosing, or even robbing a bank and shooting somebody which can lad me in jail for life.

The angel represent life by helping me make right decisions which will keep my life better and safer. The angel can help me make those right decision decisions which will keep my life in order and help me be successful civilian that I really want to be. It's just that little devil voice telling me to do those little things that's keeping me away from that.

-Julian, San Francisco

From The Beat: We all know that little devil tempting us to do things we know aren't right, and sometimes we give in to those temptations. The problem is — as you so clearly write — sometimes the consequences can be permanent and terrible. We hope you truly say no to that voice, and actively seek to follow your better angel. Of course, if that's what you really want, as you say it is, then that is exactly what will happen.

Frozen Thoughts

When someone close to me passes, I don't know what to do. My mind goes blank and it ain't no telling what's gonna happen or what I'm gonna do. It will be hard for me to think. But when it happens, I try to help myself think the right way. Sometimes it depends on how it happens.

Like my best friend, he was like my big brother. He got killed by the police. So by that happening, what can I do to the police? Nothing, so that's why I have to take it as a loss of my brother. I got an R I P on my arm. That's how I talk to him and remember him. The things we did together were like, hanging out, playing football. We had a lot to talk about to each other, we kept to ourselves. We went to places that we never thought we would go to. On Friday nights, we would go out and have fun to stay out of doing bad things. That's all I can say about him on paper.

-Lil' Tay, Alameda

From The Beat: We are so sorry that you lost your best friend and that he lost his life in a violent way at such a young age. Do you have someone that you can talk to about missing him? Sometimes people (especially young men) lock their feelings up inside when someone dies unexpectedly. We hope that you will experience grief, painful as it is, and to continue to talk to him and remember him for your whole life.

This Death

Thinking of the word death scares me a lot.
Death is forever.
You never come back and you can never change anything.
It's scary because it's forever, not just a little bit.
Death is never ending.
You can never wake up.
You'll either be stuck in the ground with just your name that people will be able to see,
or you'll just be ashes
Sooner or later all of the people in your generation will be dead too,
and no one else will remember who you were.
In the future we will all be ancient and people will talk about how our society was,
just like we talk and study about the people of the past.
This is what I think about death.

-Corina, Santa Clara

From The Beat: You are a reflective soul. Your vision is wide. Recognizing that this is it, that we don't get a chance to do it over, do you think you'll alter your behavior when you get back to the outs? Keep thinking Corina. And above all, think before you act.

I've had my little brother taken from me. When I was 13 my brother was brutally murdered then raped.

I'd Bring Them Back

Death,
So many in my 'hood,
I'll bring them all back, if I could
Always told, when you die you won't be forgotten
Understood,
Worried about being next, but it's all good,
Sad and grieving still is how I feel,
Life and death, a cycle spinning like a wheel,
Hustlers on the block trying to get a meal
Predators on the prowl trying to make a kill
Dat' death in my 'hood and that's how it feels

-Yasmine, San Francisco

From The Beat: You've expressed this lethal cycle very well. Having thought about it (as you obviously have), have you thought about anything that might change this situation?

Death Through Young Turk's Eye's

What comes to my mind when I here the word death.
I think about my life because the way I'm living
death is right around the corner.
And it seems like all my ninjas is dying or going to jail.
And every time I get on the phone
they telling me about some ninja just got killed.
And I go to my room I just think about everything
I think about being in jail.
Being in jail is just like being dead.
But when I'm on the outs I'm closer to death

-Turk, Alameda

From The Beat: Why do you choose to live with death around the corner? There are so many people dying that it almost makes it seem like going to jail is a good idea. At least you won't get killed in jail. Well in juvenile hall that is. Why is it so hectic? Why do you think so many people are dying? Why don't any of you do something about the violence? Why does every matter have to get settled with a gun? Is everyone too afraid to fight with their two fists nowadays?

No Role Models

When I think of death, honestly I think
about where I come from.
The Bay Area, death is a big thing where I come from.
Mainly because most of the people my age want a
certain respect,
come from crack infested families,
and most of all no positive male role models to look up
to.
Me myself I didn't have a father figure type in my life to
guide me and support me

-Carl, Alameda

From The Beat: It's hard when you don't have any positive role models to look up to and all you see are these Rapper's on BET or these celebrities on MTV. Then you grow up and you have to learn right from wrong all on your own. But there are lots of people that don't have that and are still manage to be successful in life. That doesn't mean that you won't make mistakes, for instance, go to jail, or some other shhh. But you have to learn from your mistakes to really grow up.

The Word Death

When I hear the word death. It make me think of my dad and what would I be if he was alive and where would I go.

I lost my dad at one years old. I didn't ever get to see him, only on a picture.

Imagine you have to go through life without a dad.

Imagine your mother being your mom and your dad, even though she does everything for me and I love her – she is not a dad.

For that I just wish that I could see my daddy. He died by saving somebody else. What had happen was that he was on a jet ski as was this girl, and the girl fell off her jet ski and she couldn't swim and my dad knew he could swim. He through his life jacket to her and he knew he couldn't swim, so he drowned and the lady lived off his life jacket. And to this day the lady that didn't die because of my dad, she still calls my mother and thanks her for having a sweet husband.

-Jhacorico, Alameda

From The Beat: We're very sorry to hear that about your dad. Your mom is a strong woman. Your dad was a courageous man for doing what he did. You should feel very proud to know that your father was a good man. There are a bunch of other people like you that never met their dad, or didn't have their dad in their lives. It's hard but has looking down on you right now. Make him proud, and make it a little easier for your mom, cause you got her stressing by being locked up.

Death

I have seen death
I have been close to death
I have even almost died myself.
All of my experiences have led me to one conclusion.
Death is natural.
It comes to everyone.
If you are scared of death, don't be, 'cause after all,
aren't we born to die?
Don't look forward to death, because you should enjoy
life while you can.
Life isn't long – only 80 years, or so.
Who knows if you will get another?
So, have fun
while you can and remember that death will come and
you won't know when.

-Kai, Santa Cruz

From The Beat: You are a wise one. What will you do with the truths you've seen? Obviously, you've slipped up. But you know there are better paths. Consider that you have eliminated a path that does not work. Just don't walk it again.

My Son Is My Future

What's up Beat? This be the real Vago, y'all dig. I personally lost some close friends to gang violence. It's a cold world, but God wanted them more. It was hard for me to let them go. I wanted to get the people back. I wanted to do a lot of things. But another old homie told me, "Life is hard, so death must be easy." He also told me, "They're in a better place now."

So I look back and see a lot of my homie lost in the game. They're dead or in prison, and that shhh ain't coo'. I have a son to raise and to see him have kids. I love my homie! Life's good. I just want to say love never stops! I'm out.'

-The Real Vago, San Francisco

From The Beat: We hope that God wants you to live to see your grandchild in the arms of your son. You know how easy it is to lose everything, so don't risk it!

In the case of my son dying the day after Christmas of 2006, it was different. When my son died, everything I did from that day on, I did it for my son.

Death Hurts

When someone close to me dies, sometimes I might go and get a whole R.I.P outfit made with their picture on it. I usually would only wear it one time, just to the funeral. Then, right after the funeral, I would go and get the whole outfit framed and I would take it home and put it on my wall. Then, every time I look at the frame, it reminds me of that loved one that I lost.

In the case of my son dying the day after Christmas of 2006, it was different. When my son died, everything I did from that day on, I did it for my son. So basically I changed my life because his death taught me that life is too short and too precious to let it go to waste. It showed me that anybody can die at any given time, so you've got to live life to the fullest while you're living. When my son died, it hurt my heart.

Everything I do now is in the name of my son. So man, to all ya'll who don't take care of your kids, ya'll need to think twice and be a part of their life. I regret every minute of my life that I didn't spend with my son

-Michael, Alameda

From The Beat: We are deeply sorry for your loss, and your beautiful words move us to tears. Thank you for sharing the wisdom you gained from this tragedy with your fellow Beat readers. We hope that you will live a long and healthy life and know the joys of being a parent again, when the time is right.

Who Do I Hurt

What comes to my mind when I think of death is all the faces of all my dead homies, all the funerals I had to go to in my life of all my family members, all the dark things I had to see in my life. But all those things I've seen, all the funerals I've gone to, and all the homies I lost taught me a lot about the streets, like to hope for the best and expect the worst in life.

All the deaths I've experienced, homies and family I've lost and dirty deeds I've committed leave a lot of questions in my mind. Like why not me yet? Why couldn't them bullets hit me? Why it had to be my ninja right next to? Why did the bullet just skin me and kill my cousin? Will the streets ever get me? Why can't I just die so I can finally be at peace and kick it with the homies?

When I commit a crime, who do I hurt? 'Cause I know if I die my moms would be hurtin'. So if I go and do the same thing to someone I don't know, who am I hurtin'? Can I ever get away from the streets, or am I in too deep? Is killing the only answer? Can I ever stop gang bangin' and stop hurtin' my family?

-Anonymous, San Francisco

From The Beat: Since you signed your piece, "Anonymous," we'll take that as your Beat name. It sounds like you're weighing some very important questions. We hope you weigh them carefully and seriously, because how you answer them can spell the difference between a decent life or... not.

Death and My Grandma

I have lost many patnas and family members. I lost my grandma at the age of 9 or 10 years old. I was really hella close to my grandmother. My grandmother was the most loving and caring person to me otha family members.

I was so close to my grandmother that it hurts me right now to even write this. My grandmother was very funny, because even though she was a grandmother she never wanted to be called grandma she wanted every last grandchild to call her mama.

While I grew up my grandmother didn't have a problem with me or my other little sister and brother E.J. the third oldest brother. My other older brothers she did have a problem with them, because I guess because they were the two oldest and wanted to follow after each other.

Well I think my brother Rio wanted to follow after my oldest brother Fat Boi. My grandma worked at Prescott Elementary School and all my 5 years of going there I had no major problems.

Her son also worked there, which is my uncle, and I really didn't have any problems.

Anyways I think if my granny was still alive I would not be in the hall right now. I would still be living with her not smoking and drinking and going to school. Anyways thanks beat.

-Bra Bra, Alameda

From The Beat: Your grandma (oops, "Mama") sounds like an amazing woman, with a big heart and a big soul! We're sorry that losing her when you did made it harder for you to stay focused on the positive – but remember, just because you lost her, doesn't mean you lost the valuable lessons she taught you about life, about how to play fair, how to be honest, how to work hard, how to study, how to love, how to learn. Her guidance is all still inside you – and so is her voice, if you choose to listen.

Life and Death

Life and death, the essence that forever
flows through the universe
Side by side living as opposite
The sun, where life streams, blessing those whose lives in the world
The moon, where death consumes, taking those whose time has come
White, clear, and vast for life to spread it's potential imagination
Black, dark, and shallow for death to trap and take you away
Good, where the pure and kind hearted protect what they believe
Bad, who has corrupt and evil thought destroying everything in sight for a false cause.
Water, the element that flows with peace and tranquility, always filled with patience and love
Fire, a flaming passion, burning everything with anger and rogue, always filled with aggression and hate
The two essence in the universe that contain unlimited possibilities
Having no meaning, but a perspective of its definition
Life where the light shines all around causing life
Death where the dark consumes and devours taking away life
Life and death a purpose that we will never understand.

-Potter, Santa Clara

From The Beat: Very good poem! Why do you think that some of us don't understand the purpose of life or death? What makes you think that? Maybe there are people that do and people that don't. Maybe some people don't understand the purpose why they choose to live life that will bring them an early death. They both go hand in hand just like you described in the poem. Similarities but yet they are the exact opposite.

My Thoughts On Death

What comes to mind when I hear the word death? A lot of things come to my mind so much that it's hard for me to think sometimes because little do I know if death is only a heart beat away from me or anyone else.

People have the mentality like they don't give a shhh about life or if they die, but when they are in a tough situation their attitude towards death changes – they suddenly feel like they do care and they don't want to die. Or when people go to funerals, they always get a change of heart knowing that could be them at any time.

As for me, I have never dealt with death – at least not yet. For those loved ones I lost, whether it is to violence or any other reason, it's really sad, a feeling that's to hard to explain in words, it's just a feeling you never felt before and once you go to a loved one's funeral your whole mentality changes.

So I say everyone cares, whether they live or die. It's time to stop acting like you don't care and realize you only live once and take advantage of that opportunity. Also, if I were to get a tattoo, it would be a skeleton with a sword going through it with blood dripping from the sword. I don't know why that's just what I would get...

-Lil' Curious, Santa Clara

From The Beat: It's true, when someone dies it has a really profound effect on everyone around them. The funeral seems to be very much for other people to process the death and it can change people's lives. You're right, people should stop acting like they don't care because death shows us that life is precious.

Death

Have you ever seen these movies when someone dies and a little kid comes to the funeral and asks, "what happened to him mom? Can he play with me tomorrow?" Well that's what happened to me.

My older cousin came from Vietnam at the age of thirteen. I was about four or five years old. My cousin quickly got caught up with the thug life drug life culture. He was really cool and I was a little kid always wanting to play fight him. He would always wrestle me and tell me to give up! I would never give up. I didn't know why he passed away when I was younger but as I grew older, I found out why he overdosed on drugs, I don't know what drugs but that's what he told me.

My uncle tried to wake him up but he wouldn't. He just laid there. That's was all I heard. I went to the funeral but my dad didn't let me see him because he thought the image would scare me and stick with me for the rest of my life. He's right. It did stick with me for the rest of my life. I was confused, didn't know what was going on. I didn't know he was dead until after the funeral. I asked my uncle, "When will you and Anh Bo come over?"

He said, "Anh Ba can't come." I said "Why? What is wrong with him?" He said, "He went up to heaven to follow Buddha." They tried to make it sound like everything was all right and I bought it. But as time went on and I understand more. I became so sad. I didn't know him all my life but knew him since he came to the U.S I love him so much more.....

Rest in peace Bo Nguyen.

-Viet Tiger, Santa Clara

From The Beat: Powerful writing. We know death is hard. Its hard to lose some one that we love so much or some one that holds a special place in our heart. We can relate with your pain. How can you go about honoring his life? You were young when it happened but he had a big impact on your life. What can you do to keep his memory alive?

Questioning The Lord About Death

What is death?
Why is it sometimes so painful?
Is it easy to cheat death?
Why does death seek people who aren't doing wrong?
Do people deserve to experience death?
When will I experience death?
Will it come for me soon?
When death finds me...
Will it be a painful death?
Why am I questioning death?
I guess I'm just curious...
But there's an ol' saying about curiosity...
Curiosity can unveil things you wish you'd never been curious about seeing in the first place
I guess I'll never know how my death will occur until it just actually happens.
So until then...
May God be with my soul

-Shadow, Alameda

From The Beat: You have the courage to face all the hard questions, facing up to some of the mysteries that have plagued man since he first had a mind to think with. We wish we had answers for you – but instead all we can say is that we share your questions, and appreciate the eloquence and poetry with which you ask them!

Nobody Cares

His life was beautiful, happiness, wrestling, all fun
I'm gone for just a few short weeks and suddenly he's gone
Shock, disbelief and plenty of tears
Unsolved murder, some homeless guys, ain't nobody cares

-Fidgitt, San Francisco

From The Beat: Even though we know you wrote this poem in honor of Brian (because of your longer piece published here), we thought it made a perfect poem for all the "nobodies" who will be mourned only by those who knew and loved them.

My third month in Juvenile Hall, I started dreaming about my death.

Experience With Death

I have had a lot of experience with deaths, and just not only friends but also my true loved ones.

The closet person to me that has died, I would have to say, is my grandmother, Princella Jones. Even though I never got to know her very well, I was very mad that she passed. She passed when I was two years old, and every day I think of her. It light weight makes me want to cry. Because I know personally that I would not be where I am right now [without her].

As soon as I leave this place, I'm going to get a tattoo that fills my back up of her name.

Also, I'm going to get a tat of my cousin's name: Alfonte Jackson. One day we were hangin' out, like a regular day, and my cousin loved to do flips, backflips, frontflips, cartwheels, and the whole stuff, but the thing that got me was that he would flip off of buildings, walls, tables, and other things. Well, one day, he decided to run up the wall and backflip, and all of a sudden things didn't go to plan. He ran up the wall and only got half of his backflip. He landed on the top of his head and had a seizure right in front of me. The thing I feel bad about is that I was too frozen to say anything for the first ten minutes. We were at the park. I have a big poster of his face on my wall, also a sweater of Alfonte's. Alfonte and my grandmother: Rest In Peace.

Lil' Jon Jon, Alameda

From The Beat: We have gotten to know you a bit during the past few weeks of workshops, and we are honored that you would open up and write in The Beat about your loss of these two important people in your life. The story about your cousin breaks our hearts. How scary it must have been to be there when he fell. Even though this happened a while ago, it might feel good to talk with a family member or another adult you trust about what happened. You don't need to feel bad or responsible for what happened, it was not your fault. That said, it does take time to heal and to understand. Talking can help. So can writing. Please be good to yourself and honor the memories of these two loved ones in all that you do in life. They would be proud to know the friendly and bright young man you have become.

Who Cares About Brian?

So there I was, sitting at Safeway trying to get some food, when my friend Jack comes over to me. "Hey kid, haven't seen you for a while."

"Hey what's up?"

"Not much. You heard Brian died, right?"

"What?" And within that, my world went black. Everyone called him Lil' Brian, even though he was like almost 30. I had met him last February and I had nowhere warm to go to for the night. He helped me.

He was like a big brother to me. I helped him when I found him sleeping in a doorway, in serious need of food. He saved me from a bad acid trip, with no shoes at two o'clock in the morning with his bike with broken handle bars, and gave me a safe place to sleep.

He was never rude, but was fun and flirtations, but still knew his boundaries. Always there when I needed him as if like magic he would appear, even if it was to just give me a cigarette. And I always had whatever small thing it was that he needed (like Top Ramen) to save him from a miserable day.

He was stabbed to death in Golden Gate park. And the really sad part of is, nobody outside his street family will ever know or care or work to solve his murder because he was homeless.

-Fidgitt, San Francisco

From The Beat: This is such a moving tribute to this young, homeless man who was murdered and whose murder will be judged less important than if he had not been homeless. As sad as the facts are, we still believe that both of you were lucky to have known and cared for each other as you did. In a way, Fidgitt, Brians death should be an inspiration for you to carry on in his spirit of helping others. Let your negative thoughts be, but concentrate on doing positive things in Brians name.

My Dream Of Dying

My third month in Juvenile Hall, I started dreaming about my death. I was stressing over my family, this girl, and my case. I think I dreamed about death so much was because I was under so much stress.

My first dream was in my neighborhood. I was with that girl holding hands and running. There was a shot out and I was running and shooting. I turned around to shoot and I got shot. I laid down and I got woke up because the staff said, "Ten minutes till breakfast."

The next day, I had a suicide dream. I was running up this building like the Coit tower, again holding hands with that girl. I got to the top with her, and we had a conversation. I said, "You don't get how much I loved and cared about you." She said something, and I jumped off the building.

The next day, I had another dream with her in it. I dreamed I escaped and I saw her somewhere. I tried to run after her, but something didn't let me. Then the most unusual thing happened. I was lifted by an invisible elevator and I slipped off into a dark hole.

Then the intercom woke me up. I felt very sad that a girl can make me dream of myself dying over her. She had such a strong pull on me.

-Chinese Boy, San Francisco

From The Beat: What an interesting series of dreams, both frightening and illuminating. Besides the power she has over your dreams, what else do you think these dreams are trying to tell you? Where do dreams come from? When did you stop having these nightmares? Have they stopped since your case has been resolved? If so, we hope you listen to your own voice speaking to you...

Death

What's up wit' The Beat? Chea, it's ya boi Lil' Rob letting you know what goes down when a homie dies or get killed. First thang that goes down is all the homie put on the shine on the block just so every one can know, that that homie was a very well loved and respected person.

Then, when it comes down to the funeral an' shhh, everyone down the 'hood goes, even people from otha 'hoods come through to show love to the fallen soulja.

I remember when Matt big homie died. About three hun'ed people slid through to show him love. This shows how much a death of a person can affect hundreds of lives.

Well Beat, that all I gots to say

-Lil' Robet, San Francisco

From The Beat: We gave this straightforward description a Piece Of the Week because you taught us something in a respectful way. Even using the example of your dead homie (RIP), you didn't hate on anyone. We agree with your point, that every death (on all sides of all wars) affects so many others!

So Many Tears

They say death is one of two things you can't escape in life. From what I see there are a lot of young people who are not even trying to run from it. Instead they are walking and even stopping all together, turning around and trying to let it catch up with them.

I have yet to experience someone who is really close to me passing away. I've had grandparents, and friend's parents who've passed on. I remember being at my grandparent's funeral and everyone else was crying, but not me. I didn't know why I just couldn't do it. Afterwards, I cried but that's only because I felt isolated for being the only one not crying. I still, to this day, don't know why.

I only tell this story because I see young men who have been to so many funerals that they don't and can't cry. That's a sad fact when you're no longer able to cry at a funeral.

-The Rantings of a Madman, Santa Clara

From The Beat: A wise man once said that dealing with death helps make the living stronger, but what you are saying about these hardened young people is true. There must be so much pain behind their hard body armor.

I have been through a whole lot of tragic events and, for a great while, felt like if I was dead inside, closing my casket and showing no emotions.

Death

I myself, for many years, have felt like I was dead. Not physically dead, but dead in my inside.

I have been through a whole lot of tragic events and, for a great while, felt like if I was dead inside, closing my casket and showing no emotions.

For many years, I had felt like life was not worth living. Giving up on many things in life, I felt like I couldn't be happy any longer.

I had lost a lot of loved members and very close friends. I also grew up with no mother, always feeling like I wasn't loved at home. So I turned away to the streets and found a love that was too great to measure. But I was playing myself – it wasn't the love that I really needed. So, I had to make lots of amends and change a lot of ways of thinking to live life all over again.

I was given a second chance in life and a reason to live for – that is my family. Now, I am very close to my family, so I live life. Not just exist. Much love to my brother.

-A, Santa Clara

From The Beat: This is a beautiful, beautiful piece recognizing the way people can live in this life hollow and alone but the greatest thing about this piece is that it recognizes the idea that people can change. Thank you for sharing.

Rest In Peace, Michael Price

Just recently I was on the outs with my friends and family when one of my friends told me that my friend Micheal had gotten killed at the mall with his girlfriend by some hyphy youngstas who were arguing about how slow him and his girlfriend were going on the escalator. Here is a rap I wrote about it:

RIP Mike, why he had to die?
They had to get the kid 'cause he was so fly
Wake up in the morning, change my life, I try
Violence ain't the answer
So people wonder why
Educate yo' mind and elevate yo' game
So maybe one day you can gain a little fame
But people kinda crazy
They don't feel me, they insane
RIP Mike, you know the game

-Junior F Baby, Alameda

From The Beat: What kind of world are we living in when a young man gets killed for riding too slow on an escalator? This is tragic, and it's scary. We hope that you will take serious steps in your life to get away from the violence and the hate.

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At The Beat Within, we [illegible] the right to edit submitted content for length, publication and legal reasons. [illegible] Writers who sign their work are responsible for the accuracy of their stories. [illegible] Our goal is to create a safe space for [illegible] to express themselves honestly. Our goal is not to glorify violence or criminal activity.

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To our writers: What you write could be read by anyone. Your words have the power to change minds. Use it well. Be sure to illustrate your feelings and experiences with as much detail as possible. Try to show us how you think and feel and what is happening in your life. Remember to write with the knowledge that your writing will be read by people outside of your world.

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